



U.S. Department of Labor
Fiscal Year 2026 Capacity Assessment
January 2026

Introduction

The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) relies on evidence to ensure the Department’s activities respond to the Nation’s needs and effectively support the U.S. workforce. “Evidence” can be defined as data that informs decision-making when developing, operating, or assessing agency programs and activities, such as from foundational fact finding, performance measurement, policy analysis, and program evaluation (see [OMB M-19-23](#), page 1).

In 2018, Congress passed the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act (the “Evidence Act”), which requires federal agencies to assess their capacity to build and use evidence in four areas defined below: evaluation, statistical activities, research, and other analysis activities ([5 U.S.C. § 306\(a\)\(9\)](#)).

- **Evaluation:** Systematic analysis of an agency’s programs, policies, or organizations to improve effectiveness and efficiency. Examples include implementation evaluations and outcome evaluations. See [5 U.S.C. § 311\(3\)](#).
- **Statistical Activities:** Collecting, compiling, processing, and analyzing data, as well as developing related methodologies. Examples include administering surveys and creating sampling frames. See [44 USC § 3561\(10\)](#).
- **Research:** Systematic investigation that develops or contributes to generalizable knowledge. Examples include basic science and applied research. See [45 CFR §46.102](#).
- **Other Analysis Activities:** Other activities that help agencies build evidence but may not fit neatly into the categories of evaluation, statistical activities, and research. Examples include policy analysis and regulatory impact analysis. See [OMB M-21-27](#), Figure A.1 on page 19.

Within each of those four areas, agencies must examine five topics: coverage, methods, quality, independence, and effectiveness. The Capacity Assessment must be conducted every four years. DOL completed its [first Capacity Assessment](#) in Fiscal Year (FY) 2022, and this report details the results of DOL’s Capacity Assessment for FY 2026.

Methodology

DOL’s Chief Evaluation Office (CEO) collected data for the FY 2026 Capacity Assessment in December 2025. CEO included all agencies listed in [DOL’s organizational chart](#) in the initial Capacity Assessment data call.¹ Agencies that reported evidence activities on the data call submitted samples of their evidence-building work, and agencies that contributed to DOL’s FY 2026/2027 Learning Agenda provided additional data on evidence-building projects. Participating agencies fell into three main categories: Employment & Training (N = 4); Protection & Compliance (N = 8); and Statistics, Policy & Management (N = 8) (Exhibit 1).

¹ The Office of the Chief Information Officer was included under the larger Office of the Assistant Secretary for Administration and Management, and the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Policy reported evidence-building activities for the Executive Secretary. The Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation was excluded due to their independent status.

Exhibit 1: Agencies that Participated in the U.S. Department of Labor’s Capacity Assessment (N = 20)

Employment & Training (N = 4)	Protection & Compliance (N = 8)	Statistics, Policy & Management (N = 8)
Employment and Training Administration (ETA)*	Bureau of International Labor Affairs (ILAB)*	Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS)*
Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP)*	Employee Benefits Security Administration (EBSA)*	Office of Administrative Law Judges (OALJ)
Veterans’ Employment and Training Service (VETS)*	Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA)*	Office of Inspector General (OIG)
Women’s Bureau (WB)*	Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)*	Office of Public Affairs (OPA)
—	Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP)*	Office of the Assistant Secretary for Administration and Management (OASAM)*
—	Office of Labor-Management Standards (OLMS)*	Office of the Assistant Secretary for Policy (OASP)
—	Office of Workers’ Compensation Programs (OWCP)*	Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO)*
—	Wage and Hour Division (WHD)*	Office of the Ombudsman for the Energy Employees Occupational Illness Program (EEOMBD)

*U.S. Department of Labor Learning Agenda agency. Note: Two agencies that did not report evidence activities were screened out after the initial data call and did not participate in the document review. Agencies that were invited to participate but did not respond to the data call are not included in the table.

CEO used three methods² to analyze DOL’s capacity to build and use evidence:



1. Data Call

The data call included 12 questions about how agencies built and used evidence in the prior year. It also asked about their evidence workforce. CEO sent the data call to 25 agencies, and 20 submitted responses. Non-responsive agencies have missions that are less focused on evidence-building, so the results in this report still capture the majority of DOL’s evidence-building capacity.



2. Document Review

CEO asked agencies to submit one to four reports, infographics, methodology documents, or other materials that best represented their capacity in evaluation, statistical activities, research, or other analysis activities, if applicable. CEO conducted a document review, assessing the documents using a shared rubric. Of the 18 agencies that reported evidence activities and were

² CEO planned to hold follow-up conversations with agencies that participated in the data call to collect more in-depth data on DOL’s capacity. However, time constraints following the government shutdown in October and November 2025 meant CEO had to drop that method from the FY 2026 Capacity Assessment.

eligible to participate in the document review, 16 submitted documents. Three CEO analysts reviewed a total of 52 documents, an average of 3.25 documents per agency.³



3. Agency Learning Agendas

Fifteen agencies also contributed to DOL’s FY 2026 Learning Agenda. CEO reviewed those agencies’ Learning Agendas for background on recently completed, ongoing, and proposed studies. The studies are not listed in this report but roll up into DOL’s annual [Evidence Plan](#) and informed the development of the data call and document review instruments.

Results

The results are divided according to the five Capacity Assessment topics: coverage, methods, quality, independence, and effectiveness.

Coverage

Ninety percent of DOL agencies that responded to the data call reported evidence-building activities in at least one area within the last 12 months. Among agencies that reported evidence-building activities, statistical activities (89%) and other types of analysis (89%) were the most common areas, followed by research (83%) and evaluation (67%). The Employment & Training category had the largest percentage of agencies participating in all four areas, with 75% conducting evaluation, statistical activities, research and other types of analysis in the last 12 months.

Exhibit 2: Percentage of U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) Agencies Reporting Evidence-Building Activities in the Last 12 Months, by Category (N = 18 Agencies)

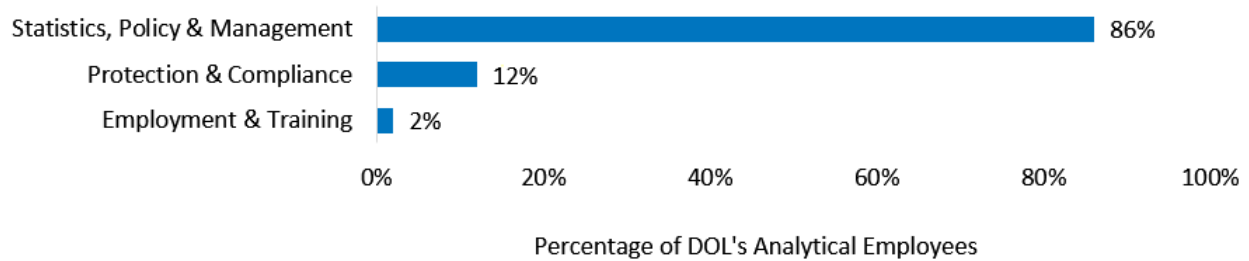
Evidence Areas	Employment & Training (N = 4)	Protection & Compliance (N = 8)	Statistics, Policy & Management (N = 6)	DOL Overall (N = 18)
Evaluation	75%	63%	67%	67%
Statistical Activities	100%	88%	83%	89%
Research	100%	75%	83%	83%
Other Types of Analysis	100%	100%	67%	89%

Note: This table only includes agencies that reported at least one evidence activity. Two Statistics, Policy & Management agencies did not report evidence activities in the past 12 months and are excluded from this table.

³ The analysts had 100% agreement when completing the rubric on the first document. Analysts reviewed the remaining documents independently, aside from periodic team reviews to ensure high inter-rater reliability. Specifically, each analyst selected three of their most challenging documents (nine total) to discuss as a team during the review period to ensure continued agreement. Analysts obtained 100% agreement on the nine documents.

Nearly all (94%) of the agencies that reported evidence-building activities employed federal staff to conduct analytical work, and 67% hired contractors to supplement their evidence-building capacity.⁴ Staff with at least some analytical responsibilities made up 22% of federal employees within DOL agencies that reported evidence activities. Most of DOL’s federal staff with evidence-building responsibilities supported DOL from within Statistics, Policy & Management agencies (86%), but some worked in Protection & Compliance (12%) or Employment & Training (two percent) agencies (Exhibit 3).

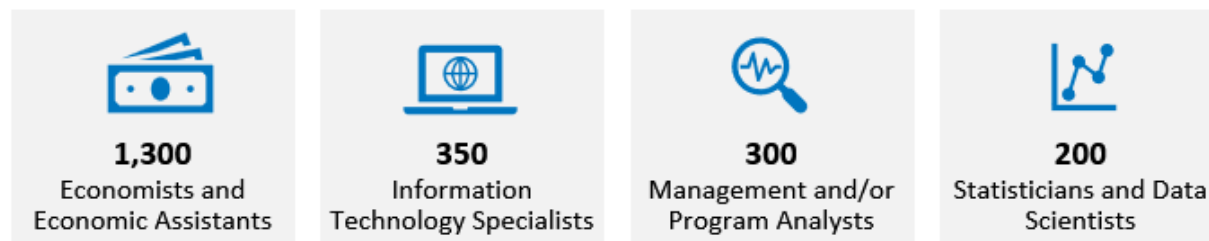
Exhibit 3: Distribution of Federal Employees that Engaged in Evidence-Building Activities within the U.S. Department of Labor, by Category (N = Approximately 2,500 Employees in 17 Agencies)



Note: The N is 17 because one of the 18 agencies that reported evidence-building activities did not report any full-time equivalent federal staff engaged in analytical work. The percentages are based on 2,498 employees (the sum of the counts that agencies reported), but the numbers are estimates given widespread staffing changes at the U.S. Department of Labor in fall 2025 due to the deferred resignation program.

The Statistics, Policy & Management category includes the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), one of the U.S. Government’s principal statistical agencies. BLS employed most of DOL’s analytical staff (78%), as it produces the Department’s critical reports on major economic indicators. The Statistics, Policy & Management category also includes CEO, which collaborates with agencies to develop and implement DOL’s Learning Agenda and Evidence Plan. CEO employed 0.4% of DOL’s analytical staff. The main occupations conducting evidence-related work at DOL were economists and economic assistants (approximately 1,300 employees), information technology specialists (approximately 350 employees), management and/or program analysts (approximately 300 employees), and statisticians and data scientists (approximately 200 employees) (Exhibit 4).

Exhibit 4: Largest Evidence-Building Occupations within the U.S. Department of Labor (N = 17 Agencies with Federal Employees Engaged in Evidence-Building Activities)



⁴ This section reports percentages and approximate counts instead of exact full-time equivalents because there were widespread staffing changes during the fall of 2025 due to the deferred resignation program. Agencies provided data on the number of full-time federal staff they employed as of October 1, 2025, and agencies reported the number of full-time federal staff that performed functions related to evaluation, statistics, research, or other forms of analysis.

Methods

Twelve agencies conducted evaluations in the prior year. The most common types were outcome studies (83%), evaluability assessments (67%), process or implementation studies (67%), and impact evaluations (67%) (Exhibit 5). Many agencies also conducted formative evaluations (58%) or economic studies (50%).

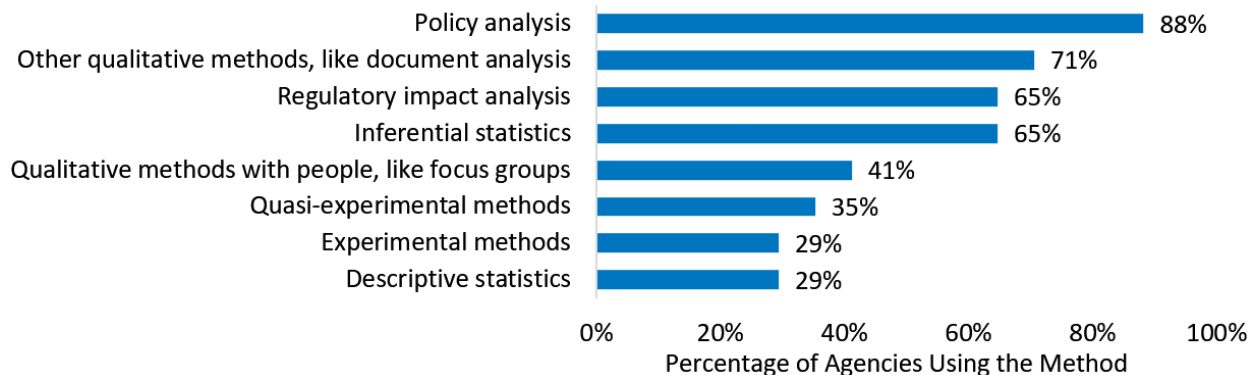
Exhibit 5: Types of Evaluations that U.S. Department of Labor Agencies Conducted in the Past 12 Months (N = 12 Agencies that Conducted at Least One Evaluation)

Type of Evaluation	Example Evaluation Question	Percentage of Agencies
Outcome	Is this activity achieving its goals?	83%
Evaluability	Can we properly evaluate this question?	67%
Process or Implementation	Is this activity being implemented as planned?	67%
Impact	Is there a causal link between the activity and the observed outcomes? What are the outcomes for non-participants?	67%
Formative	Is this activity feasible, appropriate, and reaching the right audience?	58%
Economic	How effective is the activity relative to its cost?	50%

Note: Sample evaluation questions are drawn from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s “Approach to Program Evaluation: Step 3 – Focus the Evaluation Questions and Design.” 2024. [CDC Evaluation Framework Action Guide](#).

Common methods for the other evidence areas (statistics, research, and other analysis activities) included policy analysis (88%); qualitative methods that did not involve people, such as document analysis (71%); regulatory impact analysis (65%); inferential statistics (65%); qualitative methods that involved people, such as focus groups (41%); quasi-experimental studies (35%); experimental methods (29%); and descriptive statistics (29%) (Exhibit 6). At least one agency in each of the DOL categories (Employment & Training; Protection & Compliance; Statistics, Policy & Management) used experimental methods like randomized controlled trials, A/B tests, or split-ballot tests.

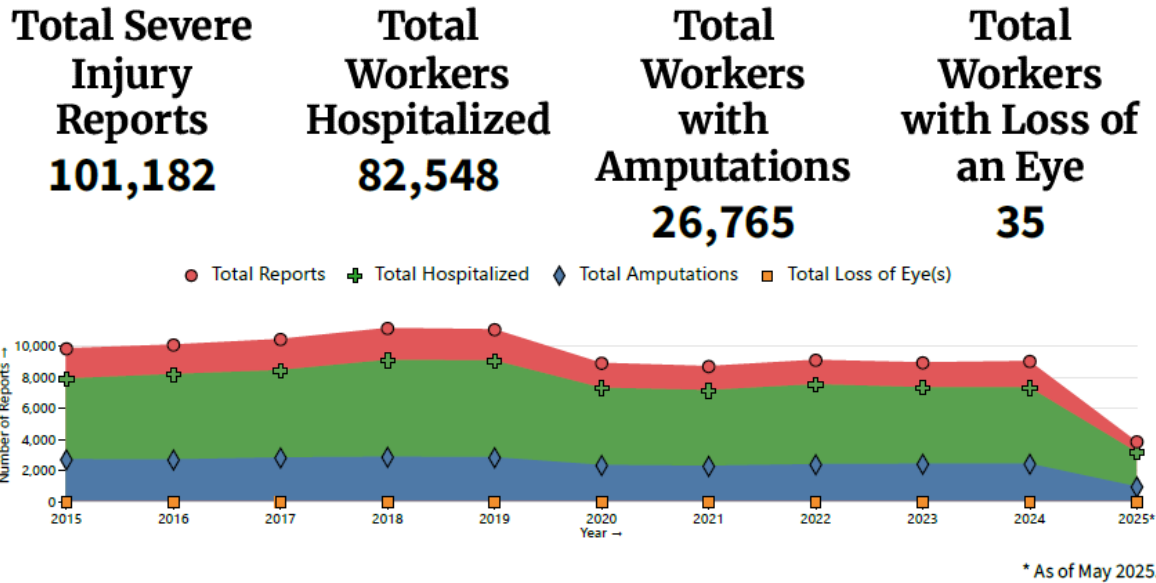
Exhibit 6: Methods that U.S. Department of Labor Agencies Used for Statistical, Research, or Other Analysis Activities (N = 17 Agencies that Conducted at Least One Eligible Activity)



Quality

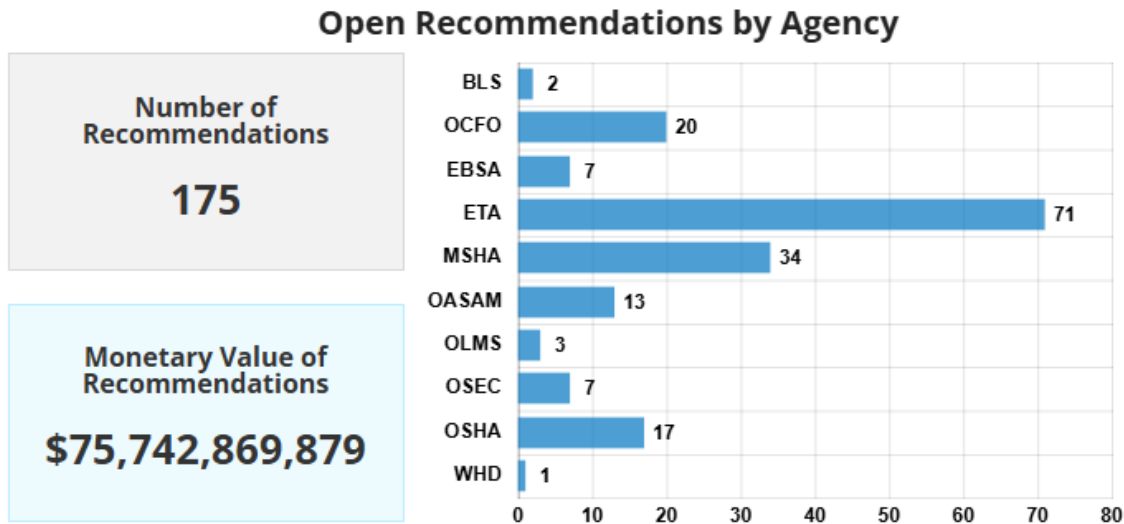
During the document review, CEO analysts identified several areas of strength across the materials DOL agencies submitted, including sharing data with the public via interactive dashboards, creating data visualizations, and communicating complex data and ideas for general readers. Areas for improvement included discussing why the findings matter to the public, as well as how DOL plans to act on the findings. Exhibits 7 and 8 provide two examples of DOL’s public-facing interactive data dashboards.⁵

Exhibit 7: The Occupational Safety and Health Administration’s Severe Injury Dashboard



Source: [OSHA Severe Injury Report](#). Accessed January 7, 2026.

Exhibit 8: The Office of the Inspector General’s Recommendation Dashboard



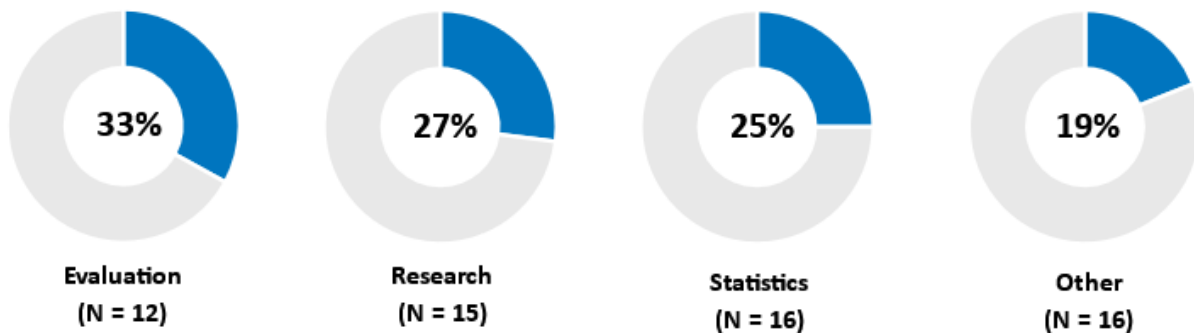
Source: [OIG Open Recommendation Dashboard](#). Accessed January 7, 2026.

⁵ For another example, see the Mine Safety and Health Administration’s Top 10 Most Frequently Cited Standards dashboard: [MSHA’s Top 10 Most Frequently Cited Standards](#).

Independence

According to [DOL's Evaluation Policy](#),⁶ independence and objectivity are core principles of evaluation. Agency and program leadership, program staff, stakeholders, and others should participate in setting evaluation priorities, identifying evaluation questions, and assessing the implications of findings. To promote objectivity, DOL protects independence in the design, conduct, and analysis of evaluations. After technical peer review, the Chief Evaluation Officer subsequently approves, releases, and disseminates evaluation reports. Agencies partnered with CEO and CEO's third-party contractors to conduct independent evaluations (33%), research (27%), statistical activities (25%), and other types of analysis (19%) (Exhibit 9).

Exhibit 9: Percentage of U.S. Department of Labor Agencies Collaborating with the Chief Evaluation Office in the Past 12 Months, by Area (N = 18 Agencies that Reported Evidence-Building Activities)



DOL protects the credibility and objectivity of its major statistical agency, BLS, which produces measures of labor market activity, working conditions, price changes, and productivity in the U.S. economy to support public and private decision making.

Effectiveness

In addition to identifying the methods that agencies used and the quality of the materials, CEO analysts also used the document review to evaluate how effectively the documents communicated a list of key analytical components, as a proxy for understanding whether the materials are effective at translating evidence into findings that policymakers and the public can use to make decisions. Analysts found that 50% or more of all the documents that agencies submitted effectively communicated:

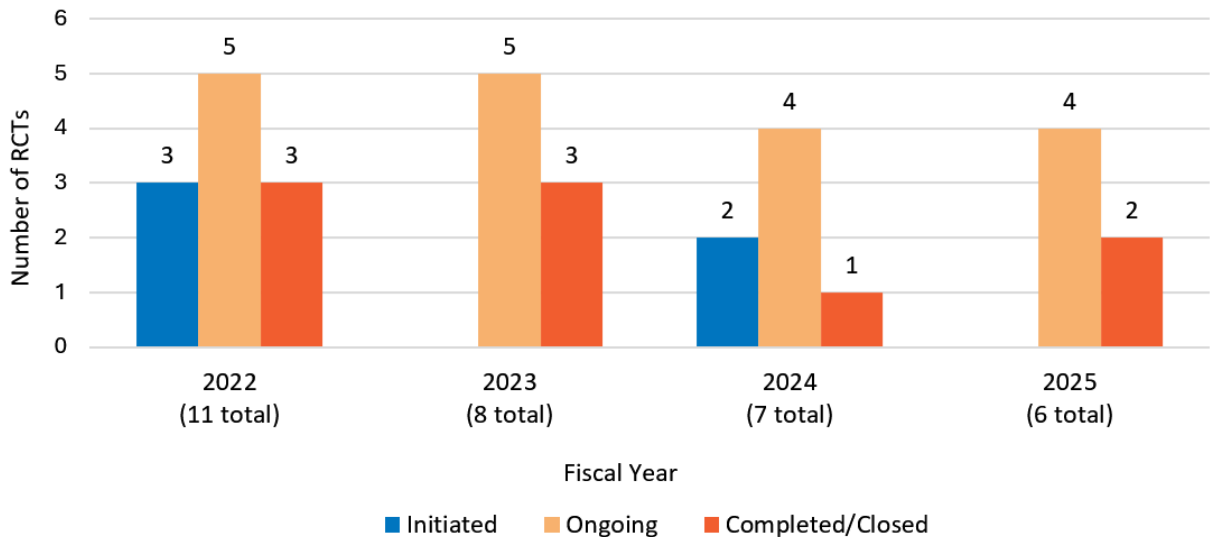
- the program, initiative, or problem being studied;
- what the findings were;
- how the analysis was conducted; and
- why the findings mattered to DOL.

Agencies were less effective in communicating why a given type of analysis was chosen and why the analysis matters to the public, although these categories were not relevant for methodology-focused documents.

⁶ Established in 2013, the policy presents key principles that govern DOL's planning, conduct, and use of program evaluations.

DOL’s learning agendas and related strategic planning and budget processes have consistently shown there is steady and growing demand among agency staff and leadership for answering “what works” questions and advancing evidence-based practice in ways that improve outcomes for American workers and businesses while using taxpayer dollars more responsibly. For example, CEO coordinates several randomized controlled trials each year, which provide causal data on program impacts (Exhibit 10).

Exhibit 10: Randomized Controlled Trials (RCTs) Coordinated by the U.S. Department of Labor’s Chief Evaluation Office, Fiscal Years 2022-2025



Note: Other U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) agencies may have funded or sponsored randomized controlled trials without collaborating with the Chief Evaluation Office. Those studies are not included in this graph, so this is not a comprehensive overview of all RCTs at DOL. One study included in the graph is a long-term outcomes follow-up study to an earlier RCT.

Agency needs for evidence-based practices come from statutory requirements, regulatory requirements, or Funding Opportunity Announcements (FOAs) describing Administration priorities. As DOL’s flagship Federal research clearinghouse, DOL’s Clearinghouse for Labor Evaluation and Research ([CLEAR](#)) is designed to respond to these needs (Exhibit 11).

Exhibit 11: Logo of the Clearinghouse for Labor Evaluation and Research

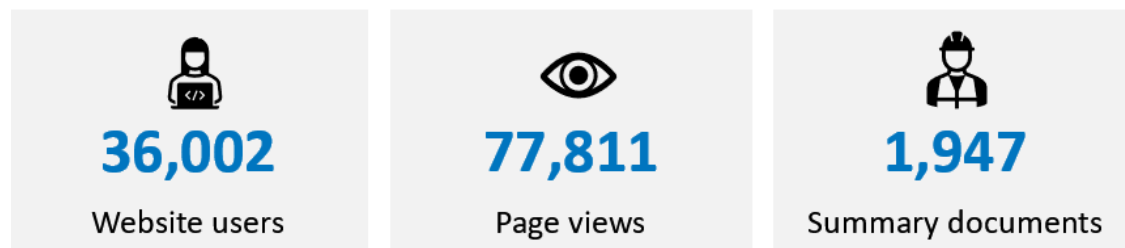


CLEAR conducts systematic evidence reviews to identify and assign quality ratings to the most rigorous labor-related research evidence available, and it produces one-page plain language summaries of those studies to make them more accessible. With these products, CLEAR helps DOL staff, states, and other grantees consider the weight of the scientific evidence when meeting statutory or regulatory requirements or making significant grant investments. For example, CLEAR is the primary tool all states use to meet the legislative requirements set forth in the [Social Security Act \(SSA\) Section 306](#) which authorizes the Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessments (RESEA) program. By law, states are required to implement RESEA interventions that have “high” or “moderate” evidence to support their effectiveness and to evaluate any strategies without such evidence. In FY 2025 and 2026, states are required to use no less than 40 percent of their grant funds on interventions with strong causal evidence showing a demonstrated capacity to improve employment and earnings outcomes for program participants (i.e., rated “high” or “moderate” in CLEAR). This requirement increases to 50 percent in FY 2027 and beyond. In FY 2024, 52 states and territories and over one million unemployment compensation recipients participated in this \$382 million program.

Further, eight of 20 FOAs – representing about \$633 million – released between January 2024 and June 2025 referenced or required the use of CLEAR. These FOAs spanned key DOL Employment and Training Administration (ETA) program areas including reemployment (RESEA), but also community colleges, older workers, reentry, workforce system modernization, and youth. Prospective applicants included, but were not limited to, state, county, and municipal governments; public housing authorities; higher education institutions; and nonprofit organizations. ETA’s 2025 Funding Opportunity Announcement Application Guide also pointed to CLEAR as a key tool to find research that provides evidence of a sound approach, when designing applications for all FOAs.

From June 2024 to May 2025, CLEAR had 36,002 website users and 77,811 page views, and made 1,947 labor-related research summary documents available to the public, including 310 new study reviews (Exhibit 12). Going forward, CLEAR is positioned to help DOL and its grantees be in better compliance with evidence use, building, and dissemination requirements at [2 CFR 200](#), in the [Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act](#), and with Administration priorities such as [Executive Order 14303, Restoring Gold Standard Science](#). CLEAR offers [standards](#) for designing rigorous evaluations as well as [review processes](#) that incorporate peer review, transparency, replicability, ratings of study quality, and plain-language summaries of the evidence, enabling users to access credible evidence information in a centralized place.

Exhibit 12: Clearinghouse for Labor Evaluation and Research Website Users, Page Views, and Labor-Related Research Summaries, June 2024 to May 2025



Limitations

As CEO only collected data in December 2025, the findings in this report should be understood as a point-in-time analysis rather than a reflection of DOL's capacity over time.

Another limitation is that DOL's Capacity Assessment data collection period was cut short by the government shutdown in October and November 2025. As a result, CEO had to drop the follow-up discussions it had planned to have with DOL agencies to collect more in-depth responses on the required Capacity Assessment topics. Without those discussions, this report can only offer a high-level overview of DOL's evidence-building capacity and is unable to identify specific challenges agencies face or areas where they wish to grow. The report also omits a discussion of artificial intelligence (AI), although AI is an increasingly important partner in analyzing complex administrative data.

Conclusion

A key finding of this Capacity Assessment is that most of DOL's analytical staff work in Statistics, Policy & Management agencies, such as BLS. However, 14% of DOL's analytical staff are housed in Employment & Training and Protection & Compliance agencies, which keeps evidence-building activities close to the complex subject matter material of much of DOL's deeply technical work.

CEO plays a vital role in supporting evidence-building across DOL in a way that aligns with the best principles of Gold Standard Science.^{7,8} Every year, CEO helps agencies develop their own Learning Agendas and the Department's Evaluation Plan, which promotes transparency, collaboration, interdisciplinarity, and research questions structured for falsifiability of hypotheses. CEO also supports Gold Standard Science principles, including the following ways. First, CEO requires disclosure of conflicts by staff, reviewers, and contractors. Second, contracting with third parties to conduct evaluations helps avoid the reality or appearance of conflicts of interest. Third, the independence protected in DOL's Evaluation Policy enables CEO to publish negative or null results as well as positive outcomes.

Over the next four years, DOL can strengthen its evidence-building capacity by continuing to make data accessible to the public, improving the interpretability of that data through engaging data visualizations and interactive data dashboards, and clearly communicating the importance and implications of the data DOL produces.⁹ Of utmost importance, DOL can strengthen the rigor of evidence by conducting more impact evaluations that use experimental designs, such as randomized controlled trials. Building DOL's evidence-building capacity will help ensure the Department continues to fulfill its essential mission of fostering, promoting, and developing the welfare of the wage earners, job seekers, and retirees of the United States; improving working conditions; advancing opportunities for profitable employment; and assuring work-related benefits and rights.

⁷ The White House. May 23, 2025. "Restoring Gold Standard Science." Executive Order 14303. [Restoring Gold Standard Science](#).

⁸ U.S. Department of Labor. August 22, 2025. "Gold Standard Science: Initial Implementation Report." [Gold Standard Science Initial Implementation Report](#).

⁹ CEO has produced a toolkit to assist with these items. See the "E2A Tool Kit: Tips for Developing Great Evidence to Action (E2A) Products": [E2A Tool Kit](#).