

Review of Clearinghouses for Evidence-Based Practices

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As part of our ongoing conversations about “What does Evidence mean for Extension”, participants have pointed out the need to consider and review existing clearinghouses or resources around evidence-based practices. Clearinghouses are registries of programs and interventions that have been reviewed and rated according to criteria set by each clearinghouse.

Currently, there is an ample number of clearinghouses available, which are usually organized by topic (e.g., youth development, educational programs, crime and violence prevention, etc.), although some bridge multiple topics. A comprehensive list of clearinghouses can be found at <https://research2policy.org/clearinghouses-and-evidence-based-resources/>

In this document we provide a summary of three resources that could guide further discussions around evidence in Extension, with a focus on the criteria that each clearinghouse or resource uses to rate a program’s evidence. First, we present The [Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development](#), a non-federally funded clearinghouse. Second, we review the criteria from [CrimeSolutions](#), a federally funded clearinghouse. Third, we present The [Program Assessment Tool \(PAT\)](#) developed by the University of Maryland Extension. PAT is a tool to judge the stage of a program and not a clearinghouse. However, we have included it in this review as it represents valuable work coming from Extension professionals.

Non-Federally Funded Clearinghouse Example

1. The Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development

(<https://www.blueprintsprograms.org/>)

The Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development mission is “to provide a comprehensive registry of scientifically proven and scalable interventions that prevent or reduce the likelihood of antisocial behavior and promote a healthy course of youth development and adult maturity.”

Blueprints use four criteria to examine the evidence of an intervention’s effectiveness: (1) *intervention specificity*, (2) *evaluation quality*, (3) *intervention impact*, and (4) *dissemination readiness*.

The first criterion, *intervention specificity*, focuses on the intervention's theoretical basis and logic model. An intervention’s guiding theory(ies), targeted risk and protective factors and outcomes, populations to be served, and specific content and methods of delivery must all be clearly identified. This standard serves as a “screener,” meaning that interventions that do not meet this criterion are ineligible for further review.

To assess the second criteria, *evaluation quality*, the intervention must be evaluated by at least one randomized controlled trial (RCT) OR two quasi-experimental (QED) evaluations. In addition, the evaluation must show consistent, beneficial effects relative to the number of outcomes assessed on samples that are not small (i.e., a pilot study) or narrowly defined (e.g., relying on only one clinic or school).

The third criteria, *intervention impact*, is determined by whether there is evidence of a consistent and statistically significant positive impact on a Blueprints outcome in a preponderance of studies that meet Blueprints evaluation quality criteria. The review of programs on evaluation quality and intervention impact is completed by the Blueprints Advisory Board based upon preliminary reviews and the recommendation of Blueprints staff.

Once an intervention has met Blueprints criteria for evaluation quality and intervention impact, it is then assessed for *dissemination readiness*. To meet this criterion, a developer must have the organizational capacity to provide materials, training, and/or information for potential users to adopt and implement the intervention with fidelity. If a well-evaluated intervention cannot provide such assistance, it will not be listed as a certified program. Instead, it is listed as Not Dissemination Ready – meaning the intervention has met criteria for evaluation quality and intervention impact (as determined by the Blueprints advisory board) but has not yet met the dissemination readiness criteria.

Interventions certified by Blueprints are rated as either Promising, Model, or Model Plus. Only Model and Model Plus programs are ready for scaling. Below is a table summarizing the criteria used for rating programs.

Criterion	PROMISING PROGRAMS	MODEL PROGRAMS	MODEL PLUS PROGRAMS
Intervention specificity	The intervention description clearly identifies the intended outcome(s), whether specific risk and/or protective factors are targeted to produce this change, the population for which the intervention is intended, and how the components of the intervention work to produce this change.	Includes all of the <i>Promising Program</i> characteristics plus:	
Evaluation quality	The evaluation trials produce valid and reliable findings. This requires a minimum of (a) one high-quality randomized control trial or (b) two high-quality quasi-experimental evaluations.		

<p>Intervention impact</p>	<p>The preponderance of evidence from the high-quality evaluations indicates a significant positive change in intended outcomes that can be attributed to the intervention and there is no evidence of harmful effects.</p>		
<p>Dissemination readiness</p>	<p>The intervention is currently available for dissemination and has the necessary organizational capability, manuals, training, technical assistance and other support required for implementation with fidelity in communities and public service systems.</p>		
<p>Replication</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>A minimum of (a) two high-quality randomized control trials or (b) one high-quality randomized control trial plus one high-quality quasi-experimental evaluation.</p>	

Long-term follow up	N/A	Positive intervention impact is sustained for a minimum of 12 months after the program intervention ends.	
Independent replication	N/A	N/A	In at least one high-quality study demonstrating desired outcomes, authorship, data collection, and analysis has been conducted by a researcher who is neither a current or past member of the program developer's research team and who has no financial interest in the program.

Table adapted from Blueprints Standards (<https://www.blueprintsprograms.org/blueprints-standards/>)

Federal Clearinghouse Example

Several federal research clearinghouses provide information about interventions to help policymakers and program managers identify effective interventions. Some examples include: *The Department of Education's What Works Clearinghouse* (WWC) reviews research to determine which education interventions are effective; *The Labor Department's Clearinghouse for Labor Evaluation and Research* (CLEAR) reviews studies for their ability to establish a causal impact for an intervention; and *The Department of Health and Human Services' Home Visiting Evidence of Effectiveness* (HomVEE) project reviews research on home-visiting models to identify effective interventions for pregnant women or families with children from birth to kindergarten.

The standards used to identify effective interventions in the above clearinghouses are extensive, detailed, and technical. For the purpose of this series of conversations about evidence in Extension, we reviewed the criteria and standards used by CrimeSolutions, from The National Institute of Justice, which we believe are a better fit for our discussion.

2. CrimeSolutions - National Institute of Justice (<https://crimesolutions.ojp.gov/>)

For a program to be considered for expert review in CrimeSolutions, the program's evaluation evidence must meet the following minimum requirements:

- The program must be evaluated with at least one randomized field experiment or quasi-experimental research design (with a comparison condition).
- The outcomes assessed must relate to crime, delinquency, victimization prevention, intervention, or response.
- The evaluation must be published in a peer-reviewed publication or documented in a comprehensive evaluation report.
- The date of publication must be 2000 or later.

At least two study reviewers assess each study within the evidence base. The program scoring instrument indicates the overall rating for each reviewed study. The program scoring instrument consists of two parts:

Part 1 - Conceptual Framework. The conceptual framework is assessed only once for each program, regardless of the number of studies in the evidence base. The study reviewers make this assessment based on information from all of the studies and program materials they have received. These additional program materials may include nonexperimental, qualitative, ethnographic, and case-study research and implementation materials.

Program's conceptual framework		
Dimension	Overview	Elements
<i>Conceptual framework</i>	Assesses the degree to which the program is grounded in the research literature.	Prior research Theoretical base Program description

Part 2 - Quality, Outcomes, and Fidelity. Part two is completed for each evaluation study that is included as part of the evidence base (up to three studies). It consists of the research design quality, outcome evidence, and program fidelity.

Study Quality, Outcomes, and Fidelity		
Element	Description	Considerations
<i>Design Quality</i>	Assess the quality of the research design. The study reviewers are also required to note specific information, such as threats to validity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Type of research design - Sample size - Statistical adjustment (if applicable) - Instrumentation - Internal validity - Follow-up period - Displacement/diffusion (if applicable)
<i>Outcome Evidence</i>	Assesses the quality of the results. (Note: Outcomes are considered and rated separately within this dimension because programs may target multiple outcomes. In addition, the assessment focuses on the programs' primary, justice-related outcomes .)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Substantive program effects - Behavior change - Outcomes
<i>Program Fidelity</i>	Assesses the degree to which the program is delivered as designed and intended.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Documentation - Adherence

Study reviewers assign numerical values to each element in the program scoring instrument. <https://crimesolutions.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh246/files/media/document/program-scoring-instrument.pdf> The score for each of the four dimensions (Conceptual Framework, Design Quality, Outcome Evidence, and Program Fidelity) is calculated separately and used to assess each study. Based on scores, the study is assigned one of the following classifications:

Class 1 Studies are very rigorous and well-designed and find significant, positive effects on justice-related outcomes.

Class 2 Studies are well-designed but slightly less rigorous, or their design may have limitations. They find significant, positive effects on justice-related outcomes.

Class 3 Studies are very rigorous and well-designed and find significant, harmful effects on justice-related outcomes.

Class 4 Studies are very rigorous and well-designed and find no significant effects on justice-related outcomes.

Class 5 Studies do not provide enough information or have significant limitations in their study design such that it is not possible to establish a causal relationship to the justice-related outcomes.

Program Assessment Tool (PAT) in Extension

3. Extension Program Assessment Tool (PAT) - University of Maryland Extension (UME)

This tool was created by McCoy and Braun¹ for the University of Maryland Extension (UME). The purpose of this tool is to judge the stage of program development along a continuum from informational, to developmental, to signature, to evidence-based. The tool can be used for both existing and new programs.

To judge the stage of a program (i.e, Informational, Developing, Signature, and Evidence-Based), the tool assesses the program in the following categories:

1. How the program fits with UME Mission (Program Design)
2. How the program meets critical clientele needs (Program Development)
3. The program's curriculum
4. The research base of the program (for program development and delivery)
5. The program scholarly outcomes
6. Program evaluation use and evaluation methods
7. Readiness for adoption and replication

Below is a detailed rubric for judging a program in these categories, which is provided in Appendix A of the authors' publication.

¹ McCoy, T. & Braun, B. (February, 2013). University of Maryland Extension program assessment tool. College Park, MD: University of Maryland Extension.

CATEGORY	Informational	Developing	Signature	Evidence-Based
	Needs assessment:			
Fit with UME Mission (Program Design)	Represents an emerging public issue or need that could be addressed by a UME program.	Represents a developing public issue or need that can be addressed by UME.	Represents a priority of UME based on identified public issues and/or needs of the people of the state.	Includes all of the signature program characteristics plus:
	Based on some evidence of the issue and/or need	Based on substantive evidence of the public issue or need AND the capacity of UME to make an impact.	Provides sufficient evidence of impact to justify commitment of resources to conduct program.	Rigorous scientific evidence of impact
	Included in at least one Individual Educational Plan.	Included in multiple IEPs.	Defines the distinctiveness of UME from other organizations in addressing the public issue and/or particular need of the people of the state.	Adequate and sustained funding and other resources from UME and others.
	Not yet included in TEP.	Included in at least one TEP for development.	Included in multiple IEPs across multiple disciplines.	On occasion, replication by other state Extension systems or by external groups.

CATEGORY	Informational	Developing	Signature	Evidence-Based
	Minimal or no specific UME funding or other resources dedicated to addressing the emerging issue or need through a formal UME program.	Start-up UME funding or other resources committed to addressing the issue or need through a formal program.	Identified as a signature program in at least one TEP.	
			Sufficient internal and/or external resources to make an impact	
			Program is recognized outside of UME among public decision-makers and the people of the state and the national Extension System.	

CATEGORY	Informational	Developing	Signature	Evidence-Based
	Educational Program			
Meets Critical Clientele Needs (Program Development)	Exchange of information to answer questions and address concerns. Information is research-based.	Exchange of information is for immediate use and could lead to change over time in an individual's knowledge, attitude, skills, and aspirations (KASA).	Exchange of information leads to documented change in an individual's knowledge, attitude, skills, and aspirations (KASA).	Exchange of information leads to scientifically-rigorous, documented change in an individual's knowledge, attitude, skills, and aspirations (KASA) over time.
	Information is transferred to client for immediate use.	Information and methods of teaching/learning are research and theory-based.	Exchange of information is used to aid in the solution of a public issue or need of individuals, families, and communities.	Exchange of information is used to aid in the solution of a public issue or need of individuals, families, and communities.
	Information is research-based.	Contact time with client is usually one hour or less and one time and may be face-to-face and/or through different types of media.	Information and methods of teaching/learning are research and theory-based.	Information and methods of teaching/learning are research and theory-based.

CATEGORY	Informational	Developing	Signature	Evidence-Based
		May involve key partners or stakeholders.	Contact time with client is more than two hours, for youth 6 or more hours, extended over a period of time medium-to-long duration and uses multiple methods of contact, including face-to-face and different types of media.	Contact time with client is of a medium-to-long duration and uses multiple methods of contact, including face-to-face and different types of media.
			Involves key partners and stakeholders.	Involves key partners and stakeholders.
				Uses program strategies that have been scientifically tested and proven successful for public issues and needs of people.

CATEGORY	Informational	Developing	Signature	Evidence-Based
	Curriculum			
	Knowledge-based educational materials are used but no curriculum for change over time.	Program curriculum under development is tested based on the UME Extension Curricula Assessment Tool (CAT) and, when appropriate, the Materials Assessment Tool (MAT).	Program curriculum developed using the UME Curricula Assessment Tool (CAT) review guidelines.	Program curriculum developed using the UME Curricula Assessment Tool (CAT) review guidelines.
		Program curriculum changes have been made based on the UME Extension CAT and, when appropriate, the MAT.	Program curriculum adapted from another state has been peer reviewed using the UME Extension CAT and, when appropriate, MAT, and modified to meet Maryland needs.	Program curriculum adapted from another state has been peer reviewed using UME CAT and, when appropriate, the MAT.
		Curriculum has been pilot-tested using appropriate testing methods.	Curriculum has been both internally and externally peer-reviewed.	Curriculum produces evidence-based results.

CATEGORY	Informational	Developing	Signature	Evidence-Based
		<p>If curriculum is adapted from another source, is subjected to the CAT and, if appropriate, to MAT, and pilot tested for appropriateness in state and modified as needed.</p>	<p>Curriculum has been published with a UME signature-program endorsement.</p>	
			<p>Curriculum is available to other states to use and adapt.</p>	

CATEGORY	Informational	Developing	Signature	Evidence-Based
	Research Base:			
Research & Scholarship (Program Development & Delivery)	Uses research-based information.	Theory and research-based information is explicitly explained and incorporated into the development of program.	Theory and research-based information are used to explain impact measures and outcomes.	Theory, research-based information, and empirical evidence are explicitly integrated in explanation of program impacts on intended outcomes.
			Provides information that can be used to build additional program strategies and research questions.	Program research results provide evidence to build additional theoretical models.
				Program research results provide evidence that allows for further research study funds to be generated.

CATEGORY	Informational	Developing	Signature	Evidence-Based
	Program Scholarly Outputs:			
	Program activities cited in CVs and annual faculty reports for merit review.	Program activities cited in CVs and annual faculty reports for merit review.	Program impacts cited in CV and annual faculty reports for merit reviews.	Program scholarship findings cited in CV and annual faculty reports for merit reviews.
		Conference and professional association posters.	Program scholarship findings used in promotion and tenure packages for decisions about Senior or Principal Agent advancement and for merit reviews.	Program scholarship findings used in promotion and tenure packages for decisions about Senior or Principal Agent advancement and for merit reviews.
		Conference and professional association workshops and presentations based on preliminary data.	Program results presentations at professional association meetings, workshops, panels, and other types of delivery methods-- both refereed and non-refereed.	Evaluation results add to a national evidence-based database.

CATEGORY	Informational	Developing	Signature	Evidence-Based
		Contributions to eXtension Communities of Practice (COP).	Invited presentations and articles about program results.	Invited presentations and articles about program results are issued from other states, regions, and countries.
		UME peer-reviewed Extension Briefs and/or Factsheets.	Contributions to eXtension Communities of Practice (COP).	Primary authorships in eXtension Communities of Practice (COP).
			Refereed articles in subject-based journals.	Journal editorial board memberships.
			UME peer-reviewed Extension Briefs, Factsheets, Bulletins, Manuals, and Curricula.	Refereed articles in highly-acclaimed journals.
				<p>UME peer-reviewed Extension Briefs, Factsheets, Bulletins, Manuals, and Curricula.</p> <p>Books or book chapters.</p>

CATEGORY	Informational	Developing	Signature	Evidence-Based
	Evaluation Use:			
Program Evaluation	Data collected and evaluated to determine participant knowledge gain and satisfaction level with the interaction experience.	Data collected and evaluated to determine participants' short-term KASA outcomes and clientele satisfaction level with the interaction experience.	Data collected and evaluated to determine medium-term outcomes achieved that benefit clientele and/or the community.	Data is collected and evaluated to determine long-term outcomes achieved that benefit clientele.
	Evaluation results are used to communicate reach of Educator's work.	Evaluation results used to determine program effectiveness and to communicate effectiveness of Educator's work to meet clientele needs.	Evaluation results used to communicate UME's value in addressing societal, economic, and environmental needs.	Evaluation results are used to communicate UME's impact on compelling societal, economic, and environmental issues in Maryland.
			Evaluation results used to communicate the effectiveness of Educator's work to meet clientele needs in Maryland.	Evaluation results are used to communicate state and national impacts on compelling societal, economic, and environmental issues.

CATEGORY	Informational	Developing	Signature	Evidence-Based
	Evaluation Methods:			
	End-of-session instruments used to determine client satisfaction.	Basic logic model developed.	Logic model is fully developed.	Logic model is fully developed and tested for utility over time.
	No IRB approval required if client satisfaction will not be published.	End-of-session instruments used for program improvement.	End-of-session instruments used for program improvement.	Results of evaluations have been subject to critical peer review.
		Paired or unmatched pretests and posttests or other quantitative assessments for KASA changes.	Paired or unmatched pretests and posttests for assessment of KASA changes.	Empirical evidence exists about program effectiveness.
		Qualitative methods incorporated where appropriate (structured observations, interviews).	Qualitative methods incorporated where appropriate (structured observations, interviews).	Program results grounded in rigorous evaluations using experimental or quasi-experimental studies with randomized control groups.

CATEGORY	Informational	Developing	Signature	Evidence-Based
		IRB approved.	Follow-up survey research used to assess medium-term outcomes.	Program can be replicated by other states with confidence in program effectiveness.
			Control and comparison groups used where appropriate.	Findings are published in peer-reviewed journals and other publications.
			Findings are used to improve programs.	IRB approved.
			Findings are peer reviewed and published when appropriate.	
			IRB approved.	
Adoption & Replication (Program Dissemination)	Potential for adoption and replication unknown.	Has potential to become a program that can be replicated by Extension or others in state.	Recognized by respected agencies and organizations as an effective program.	Program is promoted and adopted nationally as an empirically-tested program with identified short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes.

CATEGORY	Informational	Developing	Signature	Evidence-Based
			Adopted by other organizations or Extension services.	Program materials (curriculum, protocols, evaluation instruments) exist that make adoption and replication possible.
Marketing & Communication (Program Dissemination)	No formal marketing plan, but program is advertised at the local level through flyers, newspaper articles, newsletters, or word-of-mouth.	No formal marketing plan, but advertising has extended beyond the local community.	Formal marketing plan in place and evaluated for effectiveness.	Effective components of a formal marketing plan are used.
Public Value (Program Dissemination)	Program value is evident to the individual participants using information.	Program value is evident to the individual participants using information and participating in the program.	Program's value is evident to individuals, families, and the community-at-large.	Program's value is evident to individuals, families, and the community-at-large.
				Program's public value is determined by people or agencies outside of UME using this assessment tool or one used by an agency with a standardized tool and or a process for judging value.

CATEGORY	Informational	Developing	Signature	Evidence-Based
Sustainability (Organizational Commitment)	Minimum resources are required to initiate elements of a program.	Short-term resources committed from Impact Teams to assist developing program into signature program.	Medium-term resources committed to supporting the program from the UME budget pending evidence of potential for impact.	Long-term funding in UME budget due to evidence of impact.
	Internal resources used to launch the program.	Short term external funding secured to assist in developing program.	External funders may be involved in on-going support of the program.	External, long-term funding or partners secured to maintain programming.
		Potential partners identified.	Partners involved in program when appropriate.	National partners involved in program when appropriate.