Slide 1 – Evidence-Based Budgeting (EBB) Training

Slide One, Evidence-Based Budgeting (or EBB) Training

Welcome to the Evidence-Based Budgeting Training. This training is designed for Veterans Benefits Administration (or VBA) budget analysts and others involved in incorporating evidence into their program area Budget Narratives for their budget cycles.

Slide 2 – Course Overview

Slide Two, Course Overview

The purpose of this course is to provide a baseline training in TMS for employees in each business line and staff office that work on developing budget narratives to support budget needs based on the guidance provided by the VA Central Office and the Office of Management and Budget (or OMB).

This course covers the following topics:
- Background and Purpose of Evidence-Based-Budgeting
- EBB Requirements, Roles, and Responsibilities
- What Strong Evidence Looks Like
- How to Perform a Self-Evaluation
- How OSSI Conducts their Evidence-Based Budgeting Evaluation, and
- The Now, Next, and Beyond for VBA Evidence-Based Activities

We will review VBA's EBB requirements, roles, and responsibilities by describing the primary activities of the VBA Evidence-Based Budgeting process, describing the roles and responsibilities of the Business Lines (or BL)/Staff Offices (or SO), VBA Office of Strategic Support and Initiatives (or OSSI), and the VBA Office of Financial Management (also known as OFM) in EBB activities.

We will review what strong evidence looks like by understanding ways to best use data as evidence and identifying the characteristics of strong evidence and insufficient evidence.

We will describe how to perform a self-evaluation using the provided scoring rubric and identify how to strengthen evidence based on evaluation feedback.

We will review how OSSI conducts their EBB evaluations and identify EBB process events, steps, and expectations.

At the end of each section, we will conduct a short set of knowledge checks, but there will be no exam or other testing.

Slide 3 – Course Objectives

Slide Three, Course Objectives

After completing this course, you will be able to:
- Support budget narrative development based on the guidance provided by VA Central Office and OMB.
    – Define EBB and explain the purpose
    – Describe the four primary activities of the VBA EBB process
    – Describe the roles and responsibilities of the BL and SO, OSSI, and OFM in the EBB process
    – Identify items that can be used as evidence
    – Recognize the characteristics of strong evidence and insufficient evidence
    – Determine the program areas for which a self-evaluation is required
    – Determine a score based on the evaluations conducted
    – Describe how OSSI conducts their EBB independent evaluation and
    – Identify EBB process activities and timeline

Slide 4 – Key Terms and Acronyms

Slide Four, Key Terms and Acronyms

Let's take a moment to become familiar with a few key terms and acronyms that will be used throughout this course.

These include:

- BL which stands for Business Lines and SO, Staff Offices, commonly referred to as BL/SO throughout this training
- EBA for Evidence-Based Activities
- EBB for Evidence-Based Budgeting
- EBP for Evidence-Based Policymaking
- OSSI for Office of Strategic Support and Initiatives
- OFM for Office of Financial Management
- OMB for Office of Management and Budget
- SOE for strength of evidence
- Rubric for scoring framework developed by OSSI for BL/SO use in performing a self-evaluation and scoring budget narratives for strength of evidence

For this course, we can consider Evidence-Based Activities to be the combination of EBB and EBP. Additionally, EBP training is now available in TMS for those interested in completing those courses.

A list of these courses is located in the resources document.

Slide 5 – Section 1: Background and Purpose of Evidence-Based Budgeting

Slide Five, Section One: Background and Purpose of Evidence-Based Budgeting

Let's begin by understanding the background and purpose of EBB.

Slide 6 – Section 1: Introduction

Slide Six, Section One: Introduction

After completing this section, you will be able to define EBB, explain the purpose of EBB, and list the key EBB guidance documents.

Slide 7 – Evidence-Based Budgeting

Slide Seven, Evidence-Based Budgeting

EBB is the documentation of evidence in making decisions about resource needs and allocations, as well as related policies, to achieve desired outcomes.

To understand EBB, you also must understand what 'evidence' is. Evidence is the available body of facts or information indicating whether a belief or proposition is true or valid.

- Evidence can be quantitative or qualitative and may come from a variety of sources, such as foundational fact finding, performance measurements, policy analysis, or program evaluation.
- Additionally, the quality of evidence may be dependent on the validity of data collection, type of analysis, currency, and other factors.

In this course, we will explore possible sources of evidence you may be able to use in preparing your Budget Narratives.

Slide 8 – Evidence Based Budgeting Continued

Slide Eight, Evidence Based Budgeting Continued

The Problem is that Federal agencies sometimes lack the data and evidence necessary to make critical decisions about program operations, policy, and regulations, or to gain visibility into the impact of resource allocation on achieving program objectives.

The Solution is for Agencies to engage in EBB to enhance their ability to make evidence-based decisions by identifying programs and compiling existing evidence of their effectiveness, identifying gaps in the understanding of the program's effectiveness, and developing a plan to improve the quantity or quality of evidence.

Based on feedback and guidance from OMB, VA Central Office has continued with efforts to ensure improvements in both the use and strength of evidence in Budget Narratives for your budget cycles.

The *OMB, "Phase 1 Implementation of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018: Learning Agendas, Personnel, and Planning Guidance," dated July 2019* is provided as a download as part of this training.

Slide 9 – EBB Relationship to Budget Cycle

Slide Nine, EBB Relationship to Budget Cycle

Between January and September, VBA will be performing several EBB activities aligned to the various programming and formulation budget cycles.

In January – guidance to BL/SOs to start the programing cycle will be provided and OSSI will update the EBB Playbook.

In February – BL/SOs start the Budget Request Intake Tool (or BRIT) Hypercare, OSSI shares the EBB playbook. BL/SOs begin the EBB process, and OSSI supports BL/SOs upon request.

In March - The Budget Director begins Budget Briefings with each BL/SO and OSSI attends OFM Budget Briefings to address any EBB-related questions. OSSI also encourages BL/SOs to provide a list of program areas tentatively selected for EBB self-evaluation.

In April and May - OFM hosts the Congressional Justifications Kick-off meeting. The BL begins Narratives with intermittent meetings with OFM and OSSI works with OFM to determine program areas for independent evaluation based on the consolidated budget submitted to the CFO.

In June - BL submits Narratives to OFM along with any completed self-evaluations.

In July and August – The BL works with OFM to revise budget exhibits and Narratives and OSSI completes independent evaluation on select BL program areas.

Finally, in September - OFM submits Narratives to OM, OM submits Narratives to OMB, and OSSI holds feedback sessions with the BL to discuss scoring, findings, and next steps.

It is important to note that BL/SOs should refer to the current General Operating Expense (GOE) Internal Budget Calls for specific actions, requirements, and timelines related to the budget cycle.

We will discuss these activities in more detail during this training.

Slide 10 – Key Guidance Documents to Support EBB

Slide Ten, Key Guidance Documents to Support EBB

There are a few critical documents that you can use for guidance in Evidence-Based Budgeting across government.

The Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018, or Public Law 115-435, was passed in 2018 and enacted in January 2019. This is the federal law that creates the requirement for the use of evidence across all government departments.

OMB Memo 19-23, titled Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking, describes requirements and key deadlines for deliverables and initiates standards for evidence that will be used in the development of EBP at VA. This memorandum also expands the definition of evidence from that defined in the Evidence Act.

The June 2019 edition of OMB Circular A-11, titled "The Preparation, Submission, and Execution of the Budget," details and explains the relationships between strategic plans, annual performance plans, and agency budgets. EBB-relevant material can be found in Circular A-11 Section 51.2, called "Requirements for Program Justifications," and in Section 290, entitled "Evaluation and Evidence-Based Budgeting Activities."

Slide 11 – EBB OMB Requirements – Circular A-11

Slide Eleven, EBB OMB Requirements – Circular A-11

The EBB requirements from the June 2019 edition of OMB Circular A-11 includes the following guidance:

- Strengthening the use of data and evidence to drive better decision-making and achieve greater impact and efficiencies; and
- Incorporating a thorough discussion of the evidence, both positive and negative, for major proposed policies and funding levels into budget justifications.
- This includes:
  - A comparison of total program benefits and total program costs, using quantitative, objective data to the maximum extent possible, as well as qualitative material.
  - A comparison of the marginal benefits and costs associated with the proposal; and
  - Supporting information that takes into consideration agency and external program evaluations and related analytic studies, and whether they agree with the proposal.

Slide 12 – Section 1: Review

Slide Twelve, Section One: Review

This concludes the first section of the training. You should now be able to define and explain the purpose of Evidence-Based Budgeting, as well as the key guidance documents that support EBB.

Slide 13 – Knowledge Check

Slide Thirteen, Knowledge Check

Now it's time for our first knowledge check.

The question is: What is the definition of Evidence-Based Budgeting?

The options are:

A. The available body of facts or information indicating whether a belief or proposition is true or valid.
B. A comprehensive approach to making effective decisions based on the analysis of reliable information.
C. The documentation of evidence in making decisions about resource needs and allocations.

Slide 14 – Knowledge Check Answer

Slide Fourteen, Knowledge Check Answer

The correct answer is "C" - The documentation of evidence in making decisions about resource needs and allocations.

A is the definition of evidence, and B more closely aligns with the general evidence-based decision-making process.

Slide 15 – Section 1: Closing

Slide Fifteen – Section One: Closing

Congratulations! You have now completed Section One: Background and purpose of Evidence-Based Budgeting.

When ready move to Section Two: EBB Requirements, Roles, and Responsibilities.

Slide 16 – Section 2: EBB Requirements, Roles, and Responsibilities

Slide Sixteen, Section Two: EBB Requirements, Roles, and Responsibilities

We will now discuss EBB requirements, roles, and responsibilities.

Slide 17 – Section 2: Introduction

Slide Seventeen, Section Two: Introduction

After completing this section, you will be able to describe the four primary activities of the VBA EBB process and describe the roles and responsibilities of the BL/SO, OSSI, and OFM in the EBB process.

Slide 18 – Requirements, Roles, and Responsibilities

Slide Eighteen, Requirements, Roles, and Responsibilities

VBA's EBB process includes four primary activities.

The first activity is EBB Self-Evaluation. To measure and improve strength of evidence in annual budget submissions, it is strongly recommended that VBA Business Lines and Staff Offices conduct EBB self-evaluations for individual program areas detailed in their organization's Budget Narratives. This will allow offices to have more of a hands-on approach to measuring and improving strength of evidence in budget submissions.

The second activity is EBB Rescoring. If a previous self-evaluation resulted in strengthening the evidence in the Narrative content, as a whole or in specific areas, it is advised for the VBA Office to perform another self-evaluation and update its scoring. This will help to gauge improvements and identify remaining opportunities for improvement.

Slide 19 – Requirements, Roles, and Responsibilities Cont'd

Slide Nineteen, Requirements, Roles, and Responsibilities Continued

The third activity is EBB Consultative Assistance. To support Business Lines and Staff Offices, OSSI provides consultative assistance related to EBB and strength of evidence upon request for any areas of the Budget Narratives. This includes addressing any questions and holding working sessions to discuss specific issues and challenges related to strength of evidence.

And the last item is EBB Independent Evaluation. OSSI will implement a quality control improvement process, or QCIP, to evaluate strength of evidence. To accomplish this, OSSI will conduct an independent evaluation of at least two program areas for each Business Line. These independent evaluations will use the same checklist as the self-evaluation, including details related to scoring, strengths, and opportunities for improvement.

OSSI will focus the QCIP evaluations on those program areas for which a self-evaluation was performed but may also evaluate other program areas. Evaluated program areas will be prioritized by new initiatives and programs, programmatic and full-time employee (FTE) increases, and total funding. Additional areas of consideration may include alignment to enterprise risks, and areas previously subject to EBB evaluations. OSSI will work with VBA's OFM to determine and prioritize specific program areas as part of the QCIP.

The intention of the QCIP is to provide an independent assessment of the strength of evidence in the narratives, which may provide additional guidance for your internal self-evaluation teams if there are differences in scoring.

Slide 20 – BL/SO EBB Roles and Responsibilities

Slide Twenty, BL/SO EBB Roles and Responsibilities

Business Lines and Staff Offices have three primary roles in the EBB process:

> One, Leadership is responsible for the overall budget narrations and compliance with EBB requirements, which will likely include evidence development and policymaking decisions based on the evidence.

Two, Budget Narrative Preparers, as SMEs in this area, are responsible for the following:
- Developing Budget Narratives for program areas using the strongest available evidence.
- Working with program area leaders to note where strength of evidence is sufficient and where it needs to be improved, based on the EBB evaluation rubric, and scoring process.
- Updating Budget Narratives as needed; and lastly
- Advising leadership on progress and findings that can improve strength of evidence within the organization.

Three, Evaluation, Evaluators are responsible for scoring, and rescoring budget narratives, using the strength of evidence rubric and scoring guidelines provided by OSSI. Evaluators are also responsible for sharing evaluation feedback with Budget Narrative Preparers and leadership, if requested.

The Budget Narrative Preparers and Evaluators may be the same person within some Business Lines and Staff Offices, although this is not the recommended practice. These are two distinct roles and objectivity would be improved by using different individuals.

Slide 21 – OSSI EBB Roles and Responsibilities

Slide Twenty-One, OSSI EBB Roles and Responsibilities

OSSI has three primary roles in the EBB process:

One, Leadership is responsible for supporting VBA offices with EBP and EBB activities and reporting on the EBB process and quality reviews to senior leadership.

Two, EBB Advisors, who are OSSI Strategists, are responsible for supporting Business Lines and Staff Offices with EBB activities and improving strength of evidence in their budget narratives.

Three, EBB Quality Reviewers are responsible for completing an independent evaluation of selected program areas and sharing feedback from the evaluations. This is completed using the same rubric as the self-evaluations.

Slide 22 – OFM EBB Roles and Responsibilities

Slide Twenty-Two, OFM EBB Roles and Responsibilities

OFM has two primary roles in the EBB process:

One, OFM Leadership is responsible for communicating and promoting the importance of EBP and EBB activities for VBA. This was included in OFM's

budget call memos, noting that "VBA will continue maturing our efforts to incorporate evidence-based content to help defend our President's Budget request."

Two, Financial Oversight, OFM staff are responsible for overseeing and executing the budget process for VBA and providing related guidance to Business Lines and Staff Offices.

Slide 23 – Section 2: Review

Slide Twenty-Three, Section Two: Review

This concludes section two. You should now be able to describe the four primary activities of the VBA EBB process, as well as describe the roles and responsibilities of the BL/SO, OSSI, and OFM in the EBB process.

Let's move onto some Knowledge Checks.

Slide 24 – Knowledge Check

Slide Twenty-Four, Knowledge Check

Which is NOT a role involved in VBA's EBB activities?

The options are:

A. Budget Narrative Preparer
B. Evaluator
C. Evidence Approver
D. Leadership

Slide 25 – Knowledge Check Answer

Slide Twenty-Five, Knowledge Check Answer

The correct answer is "C" – There is not a dedicated Evidence Approver role in the EBB process. OSSI's role is not to approve evidence, but instead to provide support and feedback to VBA offices related to EBB.

Slide 26 – Section 2: Closing

Slide Twenty-Six – Section Two: Closing

Congratulations! You have now completed Section 2: EBB Requirements, Roles, and Responsibilities.

When ready move to Section Three: What Strong Evidence Looks Like.

Slide 27 – Section 3: What Strong Evidence Looks Like

Slide Twenty-Seven, Section Three: What Strong Evidence looks Like

We will now define what strong evidence looks like in a Budget Narrative.

Slide 28 – Section 3: Introduction

Slide Twenty-Eight – Section Three: Introduction

After completing this section, you will be able identify items that can be used as evidence and recognize the characteristics of strong and insufficient evidence.

Slide 29 – Identifying Compelling Evidence

Slide Twenty-Nine, Identifying Compelling Evidence

Evidence is not simply data or information. Data needs to be collected and refined to be useful and relevant information. Additionally, information must be analyzed and assessed for patterns or other insights before we can appropriately consider it evidence, which can then be used for evidence-based decision-making. This is the process for evolving data to evidence, leading to conclusions that inform knowledge.

Slide 30 – Items to Leverage for Evidence

Slide Thirty, Items to Leverage for Evidence

VBA Offices have access to multiple sources of evidence for use in the development of their Budget Narratives. Though not a complete list, information found within or developed by the items noted on this slide can be used as supporting evidence by VBA offices. A few common sources that may already be available are cost benefit analysis, business cases, surveys, operational performance measures, and various assessments and studies. A more extensive list of sources of evidence is provided to you in the downloads within TMS.

Slide 31 – Turning Data into Evidence
Slide Thirty-One, Turning Data into Evidence

As noted earlier, data is refined and analyzed to develop evidence, which can be used to draw conclusions, make recommendations, and inform knowledge.

Data is most effectively used as evidence when it:

Provides quantitative or qualitative estimates of the impact to Veterans, particularly if in terms of lives saved, property maintained, or economic activity generated to the benefit of the Veteran

Is specific as to the impacts and/or mitigations, which is to say, provides impacts specific to locations or sites, target populations, or particular stakeholders

Is referenced within the document as a detailed footnote including the source, and

Describes what will change in the organizations' structure and function as a direct result of the budget adjustment

Slide 32 – Turning Data into Evidence Cont'd

Slide Thirty-Two, Turning Data into Evidence Continued

Additional considerations for effectively using data for evidence include:

Does the data explicitly spell out the link between the evidence and the claim being made, for example it does not force the reader to draw a conclusion or assume they will pick up on an implicit point

Does the data point out the risks of NOT making the budget adjustment?

Can the data be enhanced or combined with elements that can be presented in tabular or graphic format?

Does the data include reference to overarching strategic plans or how the budget action supports achievement of a particular VBA goal or objective?

It is also important to present data visually as a table or graph, when appropriate, and include alignment to VBA goals and objectives.

Slide 33 – Relationship to EBP

Slide Thirty-Three, Relationship to EBP

Evidence-Based Budgeting is closely related to Evidence-Based Policymaking, which is the process of gathering evidence, performing program evaluations, and making policy decisions that could have budget impacts. EBB incorporates relevant parts of that analysis into the Budget Narrative.

When developing a budget, evidence should be incorporated into budget and policy decisions. As Business Lines and Staff Offices evaluate their Budget Narratives for strength of evidence, it may uncover a gap in available data sources. VBA Offices should use this to inform their EBP activities and develop a plan to fill any identified gaps.

Slide 34 – Section 3: Review

Slide Thirty-Four, Section Three: Review

This concludes the third section of the training. You should now be able to identify items that can be used as evidence and recognize the characteristics of strong and insufficient evidence.

Let's further review with a Knowledge Check.

Slide 35 – Knowledge Check

Side Thirty-Five, Knowledge Check

Is this statement true or false?

Sources of evidence used in Budget Narratives should be cited to enhance effectiveness.

A. True or B. False

Slide 36 – Knowledge Check Answer

Slide Thirty-Six, Knowledge Check Answer

The correct answer is "A" – True. Data is most effectively used as evidence when it is referenced with a document title or a detailed footnote including the specific finding or fact contained in the source.

Slide 37 - Section 3: Closing

Slide Thirty-Seven, Section Three: Closing

Congratulations! You have now completed Section 3: What Strong Evidence Looks Like.

When ready move to Section Four: Performing a Self-Evaluation.

Slide 38 – Section 4: How to Perform a Self-Evaluation

Slide Thirty-Eight, Section Four: How to Perform a Self-Evaluation

We will now explore how a VBA Office can use the process and tools OSSI has created to perform a self-evaluation of program areas in their Budget Narrative.

Slide 39 – Section 4: Introduction

Slide Thirty-Nine, Section Four: Introduction

After completing this section, you will be able to determine the program areas for which a self-evaluation is required and determine a score based on the evaluations conducted.

Slide 40 – Defining a Program Area

Slide Forty, Defining a Program Area

The first step is to define what program areas may be appropriate for self-evaluation. Program areas listed in the Budget Narrative may be subject to self-evaluation if they fall into one of three following categories:

- One, it is a Title 38 Program, which means its baseline requirement is from USC Title 38 Code of Federal Regulations core functions
- Two, it includes a request for a programmatic or full-time employee increase, or
- Three, it is a new initiative or program

When determining program areas for self-evaluations, priority should be given in the following order:

First, any New Initiatives and Programs, Second, Programmatic and FTE Increases, and Lastly Total Funding.

Slide 41 – Understanding the Rubric

Slide Forty-One, Understanding the Rubric

OSSI has developed a scoring rubric BL/SOs can use to self-evaluate and score their use and strength of evidence in their Budget Narratives.
The rubric is based on guidance provided by VA Central Office and direction from OMB. It includes a total of 22 questions, which are organized within 7 categories including background and description, need, feasibility, effectiveness, cost, comparison to alternatives, and evidence recency.

The questions in the **Background and Description** section are designed to provide pertinent information about the project or program and any legal requirements or authority for the proposed project or program.

The questions in the **Need** section are designed to determine if the Narrative provides a clear need for a novel approach or additional resources.

Feasibility related questions gauge the degree to which the Narrative demonstrates that the actions defined in the proposal can be implemented within the identified setting and/or timeframe.

Questions under **Effectiveness** confirm that the proposed policy or program will be effective among the Veteran population and in achieving the intended outcome.

Cost-related questions determine if the Narrative provides evidence that identifies any impacts on internal or external budgets, and defines, explains, and supports all included budget items.

Comparison to Alternative questions are designed to determine if the Narrative includes evidence to show that alternative options were explored and justifiably excluded. Additionally, Narratives should include sufficient evidence to justify the choice to those who may oppose it or prefer an alternative.

Evidence Recency questions are designed to ensure the most up-to-date data is used regarding the project or program.

The recommendation is for selected program areas in the Budget Narrative to be evaluated and scored by two separate individuals.

The questions are scored on a scale of 0 to 5 (for a total 110 possible points) to discreetly identify areas where evidence could be strengthened.

It is important to note that the rubric is based on VA Central Office guidance. If VA Central Office does issue new guidance regarding the rubric, please follow that guidance until this training can be updated to reflect any changes.

Slide 42 – Rubric Categories Background and Description

Slide Forty-Two, Rubric Background and Description

We will now discuss in more detail what Evaluators should consider when scoring the questions in each section of the rubric.

The goal for the Background and Descriptions section, the goal is to present a clear and concise description of the program effort that the proposal benefits and briefly explain the authority or requirement that underlies the proposal

When scoring the questions in the Background and Description section of the rubric, Evaluators should consider the category definition along with the extent to which the

Narrative:
- Describes the initiative clearly
- Provides useful context on the initiative's background, and
- Clearly identifies any legal requirement or authority for the proposed effort.

Slide 43 – Rubric Categories: Need

Slide Forty-Three, Rubric Categories: Need

In the Need category, the goal is to demonstrate a clear need for a novel approach

When scoring the questions in the Need section of the rubric, Evaluators should consider the category definition along with the extent to which the Narrative:

- Addresses the unique capability provided by the program
- Demonstrates how the program area or request aligns to VBA goals and priorities
- Articulates specific Veteran needs (or those of another stakeholder) that are addressed by the program area or request, and
- References (if applicable) any mandates or other regulatory requirements addressed by the program area or request

Slide 44 – Rubric Categories: Feasibility

Slide Forty-Four, Rubric Categories: Feasibility

In the Feasibility category, the goal is to demonstrate that the actions defined in the proposal can be implemented in the identified setting and or timeframe.

When scoring the questions in the Feasibility section of the rubric, Evaluators should consider the category definition along with the extent to which the Narrative:

- Discusses the context within which success will be measured, for example political environment, external markets, or administrative priorities
- Uncovers and challenges any outdated assumptions about "what works"
- Discusses if established targets (where applicable) are achievable and realistic under the proposed funding or resource levels, and
- Ensures alignment with the current logistical environment and identified areas of interest, goals, and strategic priorities of VBA Leadership

Slide 45 – Rubric Categories: Effectiveness

Slide Forty-Five, Rubric Categories: Effectiveness

In the Effectiveness category, the goal is to demonstrate that the proposed policy or program will be successful among the Veteran population and will be useful in achieving the intended outcome.

When scoring the questions in the Effectiveness section of the rubric, Evaluators should consider the category definition along with the extent to which the Narrative:

- Includes a clear objective statement (explicitly stating the knowledge, skills, or solutions expected to be attained through the program)
- Discusses whether performance objectives (or established targets, if applicable) were achieved in prior years including factors that led to good or improved performance in prior years or factors that hindered performance in prior years
- Notes if performance factors (positive or negative) are one-time influences or on-going, and explains why performance objectives were not met, if applicable, and…
- Addresses if a test or pilot was conducted, along with the methodology and results or findings

Slide 46 – Rubric Categories: Costs

Slide Forty-Six, Rubric Categories: Costs

In the Costs category, the goal is to provide evidence that identifies any impacts on internal or external budgets, and defines, explains, and supports all included budget items.

When scoring the questions in the *Cost* section of the rubric, Evaluators should consider the category definition along with the extent to which the Narrative:
- Quantifies costs of program area or request
- Clearly articulates budget impacts (both internal and external if applicable), and
- Explains that costs are associated with the intended capability delivered by the program

Slide 47 – Rubric Categories: Comparison to Alternatives

Slide Forty-Seven, Rubric Categories: Comparison to Alternatives

In the Comparison to Alternatives category, the goal is to include evidence to show that alternative policies or programs were explored and justifiably excluded in pursuit of the proposed policy or program. Sufficient evidence should be included to justify the choice of the proposed policy or program to those who may oppose it or prefer an alternative.

When scoring the questions in the comparisons to alternatives sections of the rubric, Evaluators should consider the category definition along with the extent to which the Narrative:
- Explains alternatives and provides analysis demonstrating why the proposed activities or request are the preferred option, and
- Articulates the impact of not doing or discontinuing what is requested or proposed

Slide 48 – Rubric Categories: Evidence Recency

Slide Forty-Eight, Rubric Categories: Evidence Recency

In the Evidence Recency category, the goal is to explain how the current state of knowledge is reflected in the proposal.

When scoring the questions in the *Evidence Recency* section of the rubric, Evaluators should consider the category definition along with the extent to which the Narrative:
- Demonstrates that the evidence in the narrative is recent and or aligned with the current best practices
- Demonstrates that the evidence is valid, relevant, and reliable from reputable sources such as GAO reports, program evaluation reports, academic literature

Slide 49 – Understanding the Rubric

Slide Forty-Nine, Understanding the Rubric

The Rubric has 22 questions which are broken out into the 7 categories.

When using the rubric each question should be scored between 0 and 5.

It is recommended to use the following guideline for the scoring system:

- A "5" means evidence is robust, relevant, sufficient, and supports proposal approval
- A "3" means evidence is adequate, relevant, and may support proposal approval
- A "1" means evidence is minimal and may not support proposal approval
- A "0" means evidence is not present or is unrelated

A copy of this rubric in Microsoft Excel is available in the playbook for your reference and use. The Excel version includes a comment section that can be used to document any concerns or recognized issues. For example, a Business Line or Staff Office can note that it recognizes the need to develop evidence for future years for questions scored below a 3.

Slide 50 – EBB Self-Evaluation and Rescoring

Slide Fifty, EBB Self-Evaluation and Rescoring

It is strongly recommended that Evaluators perform an evaluation of selected program areas within their office's Narrative using the rubric and scoring criteria described earlier. It is also recommended, if resources allow, that there be two Evaluators per program area evaluation. It is beneficial to have two different individuals evaluating each program area to provide a variety of perspectives and validate the overall process. If possible, the Budget Preparer should not be one of the Evaluators.

Evaluators should conduct independent scoring efforts, then compare scores afterwards to identify strengths and opportunities for improvement internally.

The two scores for each program area should be averaged for an initial score and shared with the Budget Preparers. Each program area should be rescored whenever evidence has been strengthened based on initial evaluation score and feedback.

Slide 51 – EBB Scoring

Slide Fifty-One, EBB Scoring

The maximum points per question in the rubric is "5" and there are 22 questions, which means the maximum possible total score per evaluation is 110 points.

A score of three in all rubric questions represents a minimal level of acceptable evidence, demonstrating that evidence is adequate, relevant, and may support proposal approval. Questions scored lower than a three represent immediate opportunities for improvement.

The minimum target score to demonstrate acceptable evidence is 66 out of 110, or an average of three (3s) on all questions, however, the minimum level of evidence requirement stated above still applies for each question. To demonstrate compelling evidence, VBA Offices should consider exceeding that minimum score.

If a program has no individual question scored lower than a "3," it can be considered to have an overall status of "demonstrates evidence." If a program area has 1 or more individual questions scored lower than a "3," it should have an overall status of "needs improvement."

Slide 52 – Section 4: Review

Slide Fifty-Two, Section Four: Review

That concludes section four of the training. You should now be able to determine the program areas for which a self-evaluation is required and determine a score based on the evaluations conducted.

Let's try another Knowledge Check.

Slide 53 – Knowledge Check

Slide Fifty-Three, Knowledge Check

What are the categories of questions in the EBB self-evaluation rubric?
The options are:

A. Background and Description, Need, Feasibility, Effectiveness, Cost, Comparison to Alternatives, and Evidence Recency
B. Background and Description, Need, Implementation, Value, Comparison to Alternatives, and Evidence Recency
C. Background and Description, Cost, Effectiveness, Performance, Impact, and Evidence Recency
D. Background and Description, Need, Feasibility, Cost, Impact, and Evidence Recency

Slide 54 – Knowledge Check Answer

Slide Fifty-Four, Knowledge Check Answer

The correct answer is "A" - Background and Description, Need, Feasibility, Effectiveness, Cost, Comparison to Alternatives, and Evidence Recency

Slide 55 – Section 4: Closing

Slide Fifty-Five – Section Four: Closing

Congratulations! You have now completed Section 4: Performing a Self-Evaluation.

When ready, move to Section 5: OSSI Independent Evaluation Feedback.

Slide 56 – Section 5: OSSI Independent Evaluation Feedback

Slide Fifty-Six, Section Five: OSSI Independent Evaluation Feedback

We will now describe how OSSI will perform an independent evaluation of program areas within your Budget Narratives.

Slide 57 – Section 5: Introduction

Slide Fifty-Seven, Section Five: Introduction

After completing this section, you will be able to describe how OSSI conducts their EBB independent evaluations.

Slide 58 – Elements Independent Evaluation

Slide Fifty-Eight, Elements of Independent Evaluation

For any program area OSSI evaluates, two OSSI Strategists will conduct separate evaluations and the two scores will be averaged for a final score. Feedback will be provided on strengths and opportunities for improvement, with both linked to specific parts of the Narrative.

The process for an OSSI Independent Evaluation follows these steps.

- OSSI will evaluate appropriate program areas per Business Line
- OSSI Strategists will evaluate appropriate program areas
- The scores will be averaged
- Feedback will be provided on strengths and opportunities for improvement, and
- Feedback will be linked back to specific parts of the Narrative

OSSI will set up dedicated feedback sessions with each Business Line to share and discuss scores and findings. In addition, OSSI Strategists will be available to Business Lines or Staff Offices for consultation throughout the EBB process upon request.

Slide 59 – Example of Narrative Feedback

Slide Fifty-Nine, Example of Narrative Feedback

OSSI's feedback will be provided as a one-page summary that will look like the feedback provided by OSSI for some FY24 Budget Narratives. The evaluation and summary used 22 questions and had a maximum overall score of 110.

The summary will provide overall status, overall scoring, and high-level feedback on strength of evidence and opportunities for improvement

Detailed recommendations will be shared during dedicated feedback sessions with each office to discuss scoring, rationale, and suggestions for improving SOE in the future

The image is a snapshot of a FY24 feedback summary. Format and exact substance may change for future fiscal years

Slide 60 – Improving Evidence

Slide Sixty, Improving Evidence

Business Lines should incorporate feedback from the independent evaluations completed by OSSI to further strengthen evidence in future budget cycles.

Business Lines should not edit their **current narratives** based on feedback and recommendations from OSSI independent evaluations unless directed by OFM.

If gaps are identified for which there is insufficient data to update evidence, Business Lines and Staff Offices should develop plans to gather the data necessary and incorporate these plans into their EBP activities.

OSSI is also available to address any subsequent questions or provide support, as needed.

Slide 61 – Section 5: Review

Slide Sixty-One, Section Five: Review

That concludes the fifth section of the training. You should now be able to describe how OSSI conducts their EBB independent evaluations.

Let's go to another Knowledge Check.

Slide 62 – Knowledge Check

Slide Sixty-Two, Knowledge Check

Is this statement true or false: Business Lines should edit their current budget narratives based on feedback and recommendations from OSSI independent evaluations?

A. True
B. False

Slide 63 – Knowledge Check Answer

Slide Sixty-Three, Knowledge Check Answer

The correct answer is "B" – False

Feedback and recommendations from OSSI's independent evaluations should be used to further strengthen evidence **in future budget cycles** not the current budget cycle.

Slide 64 – Section 5: Closing

Slide Sixty-Four, Section Five: Closing

Congratulations! You have now completed Section 5: OSSI Independent Evaluation Feedback.

When ready move to Section 6: The Now, Next, and Beyond for VBA Evidence-Based Activities.

Slide 65 – Section 6: The Now, Next, and Beyond for VBA Evidence-Based Activities

Slide Sixty-Five, Section Six: The Now, Next, and Beyond for VBA Evidence-Based Activities

We will now review VBA's current and planned future evidence-based activities.

Slide 66 – Section 6: Introduction

Slide Sixty-Six Section Six: Introduction

After completing this section, you will be able to identify EBB process activities and timeline.

Slide 67 – Timeline of EBB Activities

Slide Sixty-Seven, Timeline of EBB Activities

Highlights of VBA's EBB activities timeline from January to September includes the following:

- In January, OSSI develops Evidence-Based Budgeting training materials and an Evidence-Based Budgeting Playbook. The playbook is shared with budget contacts and senior leadership at the end of January.
- In February, OSSI provides this EBB training to VBA Budget Analysts. Business Lines and Staff Offices should begin the EBB process for their Budget Narratives and continue until submission of their Budget Narratives to OFM. OSSI is available at any point during this timeframe to address questions, hold working sessions, or review and evaluate draft Narratives upon request.
- In June, Business Lines and Staff Offices will submit their Budget Narratives to OFM, along with any self-evaluations.
- In July, OSSI will begin performing independent evaluations on select Business Line program areas.

- And lastly, in September, OSSI will hold feedback sessions with Business Lines, and Staff Offices if an evaluation was requested, to discuss scoring, findings, and next steps.

Note: OSSI will provide **consultative assistance** upon request throughout the process and OSSI review will use the **same rubric and scoring** as self-evaluations.

Slide 68 – Summary of EBB Process Activities and Roles

Slide Sixty-Eight, Summary of EBB Process Activities and Roles

To summarize, OSSI and the Business Lines and Staff Offices have important roles in the EBB process.

Business Lines and Staff Offices:

Self-evaluate program areas for strength of evidence and score using the rubric provided; and ensure connection between evidence, policymaking, and resource requests and rescore Narratives after any revisions have been made to strengthen evidence and gauge improvement.

EBB Advisors, who are OSSI Strategists, provide consultative support upon request to Business Lines and Staff Offices on EBB activities and holding working sessions

And Lastly, OSSI quality reviewers conduct independent evaluations of at least two program areas for each Business Line and provide feedback.

Slide 69 – Section 6: Review

Slide Sixty-Nine, Section Six: Review

That concludes the final section of the training. You should now be able to identify EBB process activities and timeline.

Slide 70 – Summary

Slide Seventy, Summary

Thank you for participating in this training!

Now that we have completed the EBB training module, you should be able to define EBB and explain the purpose, describe the four primary activities of the VBA EBB process, and describe the roles and responsibilities for EBB.

You also should be able to identify items that can be used as evidence, recognize the characteristics of strong evidence, and insufficient evidence, and include effective evidence in Budget Narratives.

And lastly, you should now be able to determine the program areas for which a self-evaluation is recommended, determine a score based on the evaluations conducted, understand how OSSI conducts their EBB independent evaluation, and identify EBB process activities and timeline.

If further assistance is needed, Business Lines and Staff Offices can request support from OSSI by sending a message to the OSSI mailbox (OSSI.VBACO@VA.GOV).

Please note "Evidence-Based Budgeting Support" in the subject line and include a summary of the request in the email message.

Thanks again for participating in this training.