

# **Facilitating Agencies' Use of Evaluations**

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**Summary of GAO-13-570 for  
Washington Evaluators  
August 28th, 2013**

## Why GAO Did This Study

- GPRAMA Modernization Act (GPRAMA) introduces several provisions to ensure that agencies use information in decision making and holds them accountable for achieving results
- OMB has also encouraged agencies to improve government effectiveness through use of evidence and program evaluation in making budget, management and policy decisions
- GPRAMA requires GAO to evaluate the act's implementation: GAO-13-518 summarizes body of work through June 2013, GAO-13-519SP summarizes responses to all questions on our governmentwide survey.

# GAO Study Objectives and Methodology

To identify

- Extent to which agencies are using program evaluations in selected management and policymaking activities
- Factors, if any, that hinder agencies' use of evaluation
- Factors or strategies that facilitate use

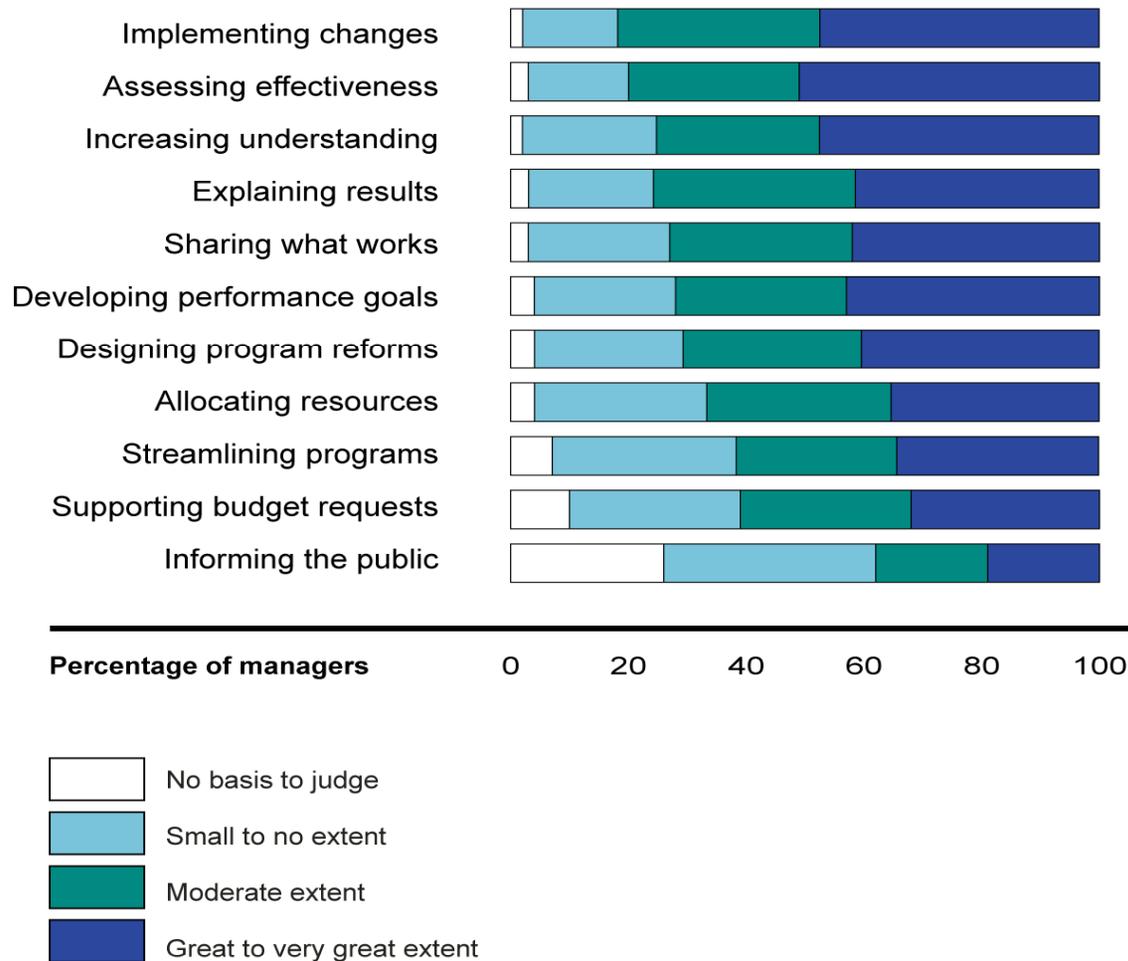
Surveyed a stratified random sample of about 4400 supervisors and managers in the 24 CFO agencies about access to and use of evaluations, and factors that hinder use

Interviewed OMB staff and evaluation officials at 5 agencies in USDA, HHS, and DOL about factors that hinder or facilitate use

## Most Managers Lacked Recent Evaluations of their Programs

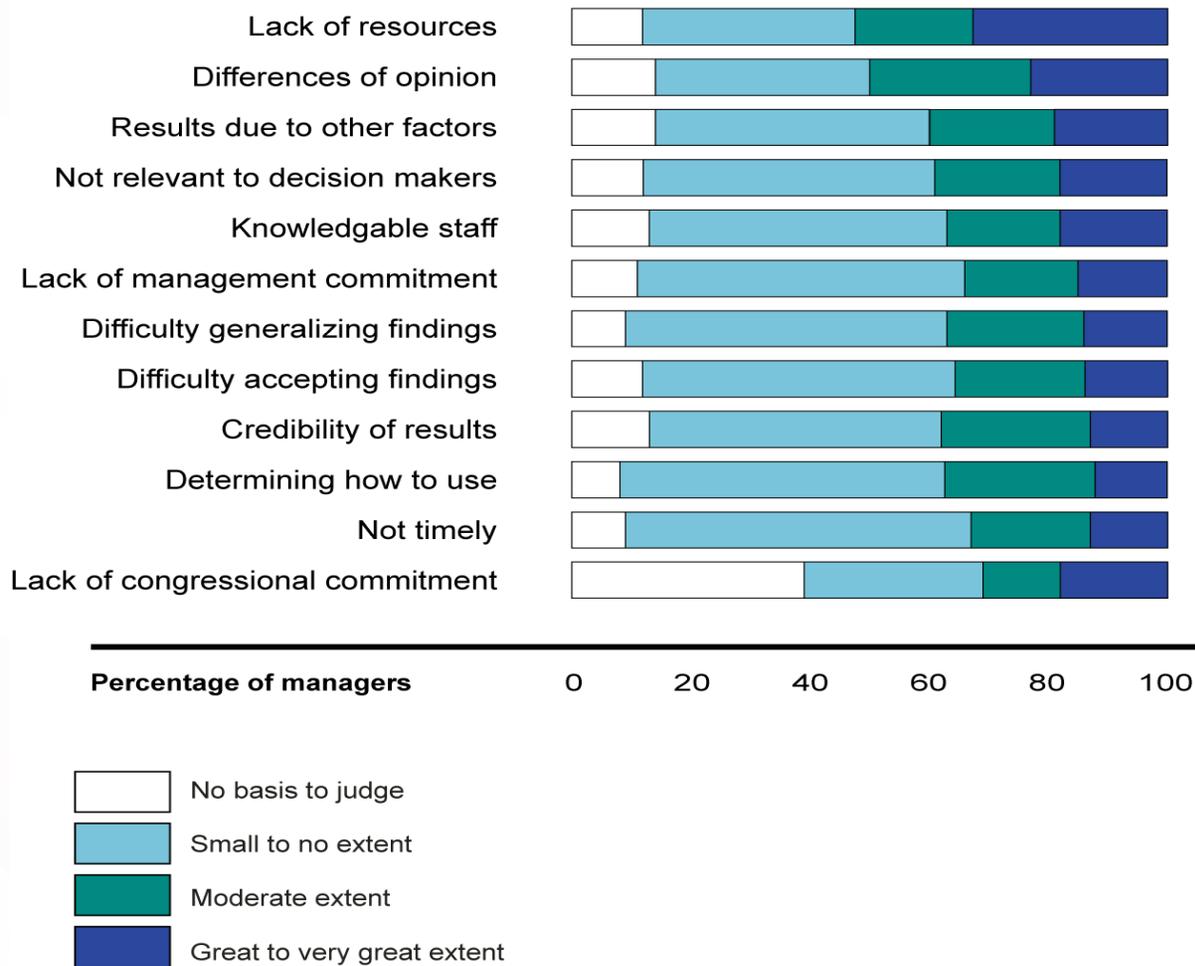
- 37% of federal managers reported that an evaluation had been completed in the past 5 years on any program, operation or project they were involved in;
  - 40% reported they did not know if an evaluation had been conducted; and
  - 23% reported that an evaluation had not been completed
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- Defined as: "...individual, systematic studies using research methods to assess how well a program, operation or project is achieving its objectives and the reasons why it may, or may not, be performing as expected...does not include routine performance monitoring activities"

# The 37% who had evaluations reported they helped greatly to assess or improve programs



Source: GAO survey.

# The 37% who had evaluations said program and policy context moderately hindered use



Source: GAO survey.

## **Evaluators Emphasized Three Basic Strategies to Facilitate Evaluation Influence**

- Demonstrate leadership support by promoting capacity building and the use of evidence, and funding evaluation offices to promote and support the use of evidence
- Build a strong body of evidence by attending to rigor in whatever methods are used, from which to respond to varied questions over time or fast-breaking policy discussions
- Engage stakeholders throughout the evaluation process—developing relationships to gain their input to planning and buy-in; providing assistance, training, and incentives; and disseminating usable messages

## Concluding Observations

- Lack of evaluations may be the greatest barrier to their ability to inform program management and policy making
- Seeking out in advance the interests and concerns of key program stakeholders can help ensure evaluations provide information necessary for effective management
- Consultation with congressional stakeholders in developing evaluation agendas can help ensure agency evaluations meet information needs and inform decisions
- Evaluations that examine a cluster of related programs aimed at similar outcomes could be key in coordinating and streamlining programs to reduce duplication and overlap