

What Are Current And Best Practices And Why Do We Care?

People and organizations all over the world are looking for more effective, less expensive, innovative ways to get work done. Government is certainly no exception. For every innovative idea in your organization, you can be almost certain there is a kindred idea, and some relevant experience, somewhere else. Knowing about, understanding, and learning from these related endeavors can give you a head start on your own initiative.

In simplest terms, research into **current practice** is an organized attempt to learn from the experience of others. Any problem facing an agency, no matter how complex it may seem, is likely to have occurred elsewhere, be it in the public, private, or nonprofit sector. Identifying and evaluating the solutions developed by these other organizations is a crucial step in project planning. These experiences can shed light on what works-and what doesn't-in the earliest stages of your project development. The process by which you formulate your questions, identify likely sources of expertise, and probe for frank advice is what we call "current practices research."

The next step is to separate mistakes you shouldn't replicate from successes you'd like to emulate. In other words, zero in on effective or so-called "**best**" **practices** and look deeper into the characteristics that led to success. And don't discard the less-than-successful stories. They often have as much or more to teach as the ones with happy endings.

Conducting current and best practices research is critical to developing a full understanding of a problem and all of its components from multiple and varied perspectives. The time you spend reading and talking to people who have solved or tried to solve similar problems is likely to provide useful insights into underlying causes, strategies for change, and problems to expect along the way.

Current and best practices research is usually inexpensive and a good investment of your time. Unfortunately too many organizations skip it because they hold one or more false assumptions about their work. Do any of these sound familiar?

- There is no agency anywhere in the world like mine.
- This problem is totally unique and historically unprecedented.
- There is only one way to deal with this problem.
- We know more about this problem than anyone else.

It is very unlikely that any of these statements is true. In fact, quite the opposite.