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A Voice Crying in the Wilderness: Legislative Oversight Agencies' Efforts to Achieve Utilization

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**THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**

**A VOICE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS - LEGISLATIVE
OVERSIGHT AGENCIES' EFFORTS TO ACHIEVE UTILIZATION**

by

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ABSTRACT

State legislatures face many challenges in obtaining reliable information about the policy choices they face and the effectiveness of previously established programs, and they have limited ability to enforce agency compliance with program directives. To help address these challenges, most state legislatures have created oversight offices and have endowed them with significant resources and access to information. These offices provide program evaluation and policy analysis services to their parent legislatures, and their work is intended to help improve legislative decision making and oversight.

However, these intended benefits will not be realized unless legislatures actually use the information produced by these offices. Research utilization literature has identified steps that the offices can take to promote use in legislative environments. These steps can be categorized into two overall strategies—developing strong networks with decision makers, and astute marketing of research products. However, there has been little empirical information on whether these strategies are actually being used, or whether when used are related to increased satisfaction with and use of research products in the legislative environment.

This study bridges this gap and identifies and analyzes the strategies that state legislative oversight offices are using to promote use of their work in the legislative process, and assesses how differences in the offices' networking and marketing activities is related to how their work is valued and used by key stakeholders—legislative staff in leadership, appropriations, and committee positions. The institutional design of the offices—whether they are located within auditing or legislative units—and the research standards they have adopted—whether they conform to *Government Auditing Standards* which stress organizational independence or other standards that stress utility to stakeholders—are found to be key variables related to both the offices' utilization activities and legislative stakeholder satisfaction and use of their work products.

The study advances scholarship relevant to knowledge utilization and the policy process and provides practical information that evaluators and policy analysts can use to increase their value and impact and serve as an effective voice speaking truth to power rather than a voice crying in the wilderness.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Two long-standing questions in the field of evaluation and policy analysis are “why don’t policymakers seem to use the results of these studies”, and “what, if anything, can evaluators and analysts do to increase utilization of their work?”¹

These questions have been the subject of much angst and theorizing by scholars and practitioners since the foundation of the field. Policy analysis and program evaluation was founded with the goal of ‘speaking truth to power’ (Wildavsky, 1979) while addressing “the fundamental problems of man in society” (Lasswell, 1951, 8). However, experience and research has shown that rather than becoming the beloved philosopher-kings of modern society (or at least the valued advisors of policymakers), evaluators and policy analysts instead often find themselves serving as a voice crying in the wilderness with their work ignored, given lip service, or misused by policymakers.

Researchers examining these questions have taken two major tracks. First, much work has been done to identify reasons why the results of evaluations and policy analyses have seemed to have little impact on policymakers’ decisions. These researchers have authored numerous articles and texts that identify factors that hinder this use, and they have prescribed a wide variety of actions (albeit sometimes contradictory ones) that evaluators and policy analysts should take to overcome these barriers and achieve greater use of their research products (Neilsen, 1976; Cox, 1977, Patton et al, 1978, 1997; Turcotte, 1979; Havens, 1981; Wollenberg, 1986; Green, 1988; Boyer, 1989; Boyer and Langbein, 1991; Lipton, 1992; Chelimsky, 1994; Bell, 1994; Sonnichsen, 1994; Carter, 1994; Weiss, 1998; Datta, 2000; Grasso, 2003;

¹ While program evaluation and policy analysis can be viewed as separate fields—one primarily focusing on retrospective examinations of the effects of existing programs and the other primarily focusing on prospective examinations of policy alternatives, they share the goal of ‘speaking truth to power’ and the challenge of attaining use of their findings and recommendations by policymakers. Further, many persons do both types of work, particularly those employed in legislative settings. Accordingly, this paper views the two as related subfields.

Preskill et al., 2003; Mahoney and Zigler, 2006). Second, theorists have examined the concept of 'use' itself and have proposed that measuring use solely based on whether policymakers accept and implement recommendations from studies is naïve and represents an overly narrow perspective of how information is used in the policy process (Shadish, 1987; Weiss, 1980, 1990, 1998; Whiteman, 1995; Patton, 1997; Henry, 2003; Henry and Mark, 2003; Johnson, 2003; Schneider et al., 2003). Instead, they argue that evaluations and policy analyses are often used in indirect and symbolic ways, serving an educational and enlightenment function that can nonetheless result in substantial policy changes over long periods of time.

However, there has been little scholarship on whether evaluators and policy analysts are following the steps that have been prescribed to maximize use, however it is defined. There is also a paucity of research examining whether following these steps in fact makes a difference in achieving utilization (Datta, 2000; Henry and Mark, 2003; Leviton, 2003).

These are more than just interesting academic questions, as they involve high stakes. The United States is facing major challenges that must be addressed through effective policymaking, including dealing with the uncertain impacts of global warming, coping with growing economic competition with low-wage producers in the world market, improving failing schools, repairing the collapsing health care system, defusing growing cultural and religious conflict, controlling the ongoing threat of domestic and international terrorism, fighting continuing government and corporate corruption, and resolving the widening income gap between the rich and poor. Due to national political stalemates and devolution, responsibility for addressing these challenges is increasingly falling to the nation's 50 states, each of which must craft responses that work within their unique policy environments (Osborne, 1990; Osborne and Gaebler, 1993; Tubbesing, 1999). At the same time, state legislatures are encountering growing internal stresses due to historic shifts in partisan and ideological control of governments (NCSL, 2004a), the imposition of term limits (Kurtz, et al., forthcoming), ongoing budget crises (Levine, 1978, NCSL 2005), and

demographic shifts arising from the increasing ethnic diversity of the population and the aging of the baby boomer generation (Ingraham, 1995). Thus, the work of state legislatures is becoming more important but also more difficult. As policymaking needs and challenges have rarely been larger, the potential role of evaluation and policy analysis in helping resolve these challenges is equally great. However, this desired outcome will not be achieved unless evaluators and analysts solve the “how do we get our work used by policymakers” conundrum.

State legislative oversight offices provide an ideal venue to examine this issue, as they were specifically created to help address their parent legislatures’ policymaking challenges. Scholars who have studied legislatures using economic theory have categorized these challenges as two primary forms of risk.² First, legislatures face information limitations that hinder their budgeting and policymaking. Legislatures operate in an uncertain and complex environment (Gilligan and Krehbiel 1987, 1989) and have limited time and information to make their decisions (Epstein and O’Halloran, 1999), and often lack information to know whether their policy innovations are successful (Jonas, 1999). Legislators, who tend to be generalists given the wide range of policy problems they face, are also at a disadvantage when dealing with administrative agencies that have much more specialized knowledge about individual programs but also have their own interests that they are protecting (Moe, 1989). Overall, legislators often lack information about

“(1) the present institutional alternatives available to them, (2) the present consequences of their present institutional choices, (3) the future consequences of their present institutional choices, (4) the future institutional alternatives that will be available to them, and (5) their future preferences regarding future alternatives and outcomes” (Knight, 1996, 45).

Legislatures also have limited ability to ensure that the policies that they create are implemented as intended by administrative agencies (Horn, 1995;

² These scholars have based their analysis on transaction cost theory as developed by Williamson (1981, 1985), which examines the steps organizations take to manage the risks (costs) they face in working with other entities in their environment. These interactions are seen as economic transactions that are complicated by risks in establishing, monitoring, and enforcing agreements among the parties (Knight, 1996).

Epstein and O'Halloran, 1999). McCubbins, Noll, and Weingast (1989), termed this risk to be 'bureaucratic drift' as agencies can pursue their own goals irrespective of those intended by the enacting legislators. While legislators can address this principal agent problem and provide some control against bureaucratic drift by carefully designing programs and limiting agencies' discretion in carrying them out, this is often impracticable due to political and time constraints (Epstein and O'Halloran, 1994, 1999). As a result, legislatures often have relatively little influence on bureaucracies once programs and budgets are approved (Weingast and Moran, 1983).

Legislative oversight offices were created to help address these challenges. The oversight studies done by these offices (which may include evaluations, management reviews, and performance audits) assess whether agencies have used appropriated funds as intended and have implemented programs consistently with legislative intent, thus helping their legislatures to control the risk of bureaucratic drift. The policy analyses conducted by these offices can also help address the information limitations facing their legislatures by identifying and assessing available policy alternatives as well as helping to counterbalance the specialized knowledge possessed by the advocates and administrators who lobby their principals (Hird, 2005).

Legislative oversight offices have many theoretical advantages over other types of evaluation and policy analysis organizations in the quest for impact. The offices are located within the legislative branch itself which simplifies their access to policymakers, a major challenge for outside entities. The offices are nonpartisan and are generally seen as honest brokers of information (Hird, 2005). They understand the realities of the policy environment, and are dedicated to providing practical information to legislators—one author has noted that the offices are "obsessed with utilization" (Jonas, 1999). Due to these theoretical advantages, if any type of program evaluation and policy analysis organizations can be expected to have an impact on policymaking, it is these offices.

Further, there is substantial diversity among the legislative oversight offices, providing a strong basis for comparative analysis of research utilization. At least 41 state legislatures have created offices that conduct some level of program evaluation and policy analysis studies (Berry, Turcotte, and Latham, 2002). As we shall see, the offices vary substantially in terms of their size, research services, organization within the legislative branch, and research norms. The offices also vary greatly in terms of their adoption of the utilization strategies that have been prescribed by scholars. Accordingly, if following different strategies to promote use leads to different outcomes in subsequent utilization of research products, it should also be apparent through study of these offices.

Plan of the paper

Chapter 2 traces the development and growth of the field of policy analysis and evaluation and its founding concepts, and also traces the development of state legislative oversight offices, their functions, organization, and resources. The chapter next examines the historical realization that the field was not achieving its desired impact on policymaking, and explores this issue and different concepts of use of policy analyses and evaluations. The chapter also examines identified barriers to the use of research products by policymakers and the strategies that have been prescribed for evaluators and policy analysts to overcome these barriers, focusing in particular on prescribed techniques that are relevant in a legislative setting. Finally, the chapter posits hypotheses derived from this literature relating to the offices, their utilization strategies, and the impact and value of their work within the legislative process.

Chapter 3 outlines the research design used in this paper to examine the activities of state legislative oversight offices and the impact of their work in the legislative process.

Chapter 4 profiles the state legislative oversight offices and identifies and analyzes the utilization strategies they follow, focusing on the extent to which

they are following the utilization strategies prescribed by theorists. The chapter also assesses barriers to the use of these strategies by oversight offices, notably their organizational environment and internal norms.

Chapter 5 analyzes how the work of these offices is viewed by a key set of their stakeholders—senior legislative staff working in leadership, appropriations, and substantive committee roles. It examines these stakeholders' perceptions about the credibility, value, and use of the work produced by legislative oversight offices. The chapter also examines how the differences in the oversight offices' utilization techniques are related to differences in the perceived value and influence of their work.

Finally, Chapter 6 provides conclusions and their implications for state legislative oversight offices and the broader field of program evaluation and policy analysis.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The field of policy analysis and program evaluation traces its lineage to the development of applied social science research during the period of public administration orthodoxy. The field received many of its normative underpinnings during this period, particularly its emphasis on neutral analysis and quest for efficiency and effectiveness in public programs. However, this focus has also contributed to the field's angst regarding its limited impact on public policy and decision-making.

Historical foundations of policy analysis and evaluation

Policy analysis and evaluation developed as an academic and professional field over a long period of time. Accordingly, there is no generally accepted date for the field's birth. However, it can trace its ancestry to the public administration orthodoxy period when applied social science research was being established.

Frederick W. Taylor and his colleagues can be considered to be among the first policy analysts and evaluators, with their 'scientific management' studies that examined ways to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of industrial tasks and organizations (Taylor, 1911). These techniques were initially applied to government with the creation of the New York Bureau of Municipal Research in 1905 at the local government level and the establishment of the Committee on Department Methods in 1905 and the Division of Efficiency within the Civil Service Commission in 1912 at the federal level; these organizations had a common mission of conducting management analyses of governmental operations and making recommendations to improve management efficiency (Van Ripper, 1983).

As noted by Lasswell (1951), social science research began to be applied to a variety of public problems during World War I (when psychologists used early intelligence tests to screen personnel for the army) and in the later post-war period, when the Social Science Research Council was established to promote interdisciplinary research and "...introduce more intelligent and scientific technique into the study and practice of government, and into popular attitudes toward the governing process" (Merriam, 1925, xiii). Social scientists continued to expand their role in studying public problems during the Depression and World War II, particularly in the application of economic theory and operations research to the economic recovery and war effort (Lasswell, 1951). The success of these efforts contributed to the perspective that objective analysis could help craft solutions to the many policy problems facing government (Shulock, 1996). It also contributed to the substantial growth in governmental funding for such research. For example, funding for basic and applied research within the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare rose from \$83 million in 1956 to over \$1 billion by 1967 (Hird, 2005).

During the postwar period, the 'behavioral revolution' in social sciences also was highly influential in the development of policy analysis and evaluation. This shift, exemplified by works such as Simon's seminal 1947 work, *Administrative Behavior*, stressed the use of empirical methods and value-free 'rational' analysis to examine social issues rather than the more normative approaches that had been used in prior social science and policy research (Shulock, 1996).

The field of policy analysis and evaluation developed rapidly in the 1960s and 1970s. Particularly during the Kennedy Administration, social science academics and practitioners—the 'best and the brightest'—were given a leading role in devising government responses to public problems, and the size and scope of governmental programs increased rapidly. Much of this effort reflected a belief that governmental decisions could and should be rationalized through the application of economic and systems theory via techniques such as the Planning, Programming, and Budgeting System (PPBS), which President Johnson

mandated throughout the federal government in 1967; PPBS called for budget decisions to be influenced by explicit statements of objectives and by a formal weighting of the costs and benefits of alternatives and was predicted to produce radical changes and improvements in public budgeting (Schick, 1966).

Reflecting the precepts of systems theory, which called for feedback loops in which information on program results would be incorporated in subsequent funding decision (as well as conservatives' doubts about the desirability and efficacy of these programs), many of the programs created under the Great Society initiative mandated that formal evaluations be done of their operations (Patton, 1997). This led to a series of large scale evaluations of programs such as Head Start, Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and the New Jersey Negative Income Tax experiment. By the late 1960s, policy analysis and evaluation was recognized as a new and growing profession (Dror, 1967), with large numbers of practitioners working within government, academia, and a growing number of private and non-profit 'think tanks' (Hird, 2005).

The field also splintered somewhat during this period. Academic certificate and degree programs in policy analysis and evaluation developed at many universities, but often under separate departments; policy analysis programs generally developed within or split off from schools of public administration (witnessed by the Askew School of Public Administration and Policy at the Florida State University), while program evaluation programs often developed within colleges of education (as is the case at the Florida State University). Separate academic journals developed for policy analysis and evaluation, including *Policy Sciences*, the *Policy Studies Journal*, and the *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* on the policy analysis front, and *Evaluation Review* and the *American Journal of Evaluation* on the evaluation side of the family. However, some journals continue to recognize the link between policy analysis and evaluation, such as the *Journal of Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, published since 1979 by the American Educational Research Association.

Development of legislative oversight offices

The development of legislative oversight offices mirrors that of the overall field. State legislatures began creating evaluation and policy analysis offices in the late 1960s, at the same time that they began transferring financial post audit functions from the executive to the legislative branch. This occurred during the time period when state legislatures substantially increased their institutional capacity and professionalism to become more of a co-equal branch of government (Rosenthal, 1996), and a primary component of this greater institutional capacity was growth in the number of legislative staff (Grossman and Peterson, 2004). According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, the number of professional legislative staff nationwide grew from 16,930 in 1979 to 28,067 in 2003, an increase of 66% (NCSL, 2004d). This increase in staffing fundamentally changed state legislatures by increasing their capacity to independently identify and assess policy alternatives rather than being dependent on the executive branch for policy initiation (Grossman and Peterson, 2004), as information is a key source of political power and influence (Whiteman, 1995).

As part of this overall increase in legislative staffing, state legislatures began to create specialized oversight units, and the number of states with such offices grew steadily over this period from approximately 23 in 1980 to 43 by 2005.³ Collectively, these nonpartisan research units are charged with ‘speaking truth to power’ (Wildavsky, 1979) by providing analysis to support the legislative process. While the functions of the offices vary, most conduct studies that identify and assess policy alternatives, assess whether enacted programs are achieving desired goals consistently with legislative intent, and investigate

³ Oversight has long been recognized as a critical although often overlooked responsibility of the legislative branch. For example, John Stuart Mill noted that “The proper office of a representative assembly is to watch and control the government” (Mill, 1861, p. 104), and Wilson, in *Congressional Government*, asserted that “quite as important as legislation is vigilant oversight of administration” (Wilson, 1885, p. 297). In addition to the work of oversight offices, legislatures can conduct oversight through several mechanisms including task forces and committee meetings in which testimony is received from the public, interest groups, and agency officials; budget hearings at which agencies are required to justify their appropriations requests, and ‘fire alarm oversight’ in which interest groups and the media alert legislators to problems (McCubbins and Schwartz, 1984).

alleged agency misfeasance and malfeasance (Bezruki et al., 1999; Jonas, 1999; Berry et al., 2002; National Conference of State Legislatures, 2002).

While the offices share a common purpose, they vary substantially in their organization and functions. As defined by Berry et al. (2002), the units may be categorized into Type 1 and Type 2 offices (see Table 1). Type 1 offices are located within traditional legislative auditing units (such as auditor generals) that have expanded their work beyond financial and compliance auditing to include oversight work such as program evaluations. These units typically are organizationally independent of their legislatures and often report to a designated legislative auditing committee. Slightly under half (21) of the offices may be categorized as such Type 1 units. In contrast, the remaining 22 offices may be classified as Type 2 units that have been specifically created to conduct evaluation, policy analyses, and related oversight work such as investigations.⁴ These units may be organized as an independent legislative office, or as are a subunit of a legislative committee such as the fiscal committee (VanLandingham, 2004). Both Type 1 and Type 2 offices generally report directly to elected legislators but have some degree of organizational independence.

As discussed in Chapter 4, both types of offices typically receive their research assignments directly from the legislature, and while most conduct performance evaluations and policy analyses, many also provide other research services such as conducting investigations, reviewing performance measures and data, and providing assistance with bill drafting during legislative sessions and conducting short-term policy research for legislators. The offices vary substantially in their resource levels, with most having between 10 and 25 employees but others operating with fewer staff while others have over 50 employees. Generally, the offices recruit staff from a broad range of academic backgrounds, including political science, law, business studies, sociology, criminology, anthropology, and natural sciences (VanLandingham, 2001).

⁴ Two states—California and Texas—have both types of offices. While Berry et al., listing included the Oregon Secretary of State Audits Division, the office it is excluded from this study as it is an executive branch entity. Further, the Ohio Office of Education Oversight was eliminated in 2005.

Table 1
There Are Two Types of State Legislative Oversight Offices

Type 1 - Auditor General or Legislative Auditor (21)

Alabama Department of Examiner of Public Accounts
 Alaska Division of Legislative Audit
 Arizona Office of the Auditor General
 Arkansas Division of Legislative Audit
 California State Auditor, Bureau of State Audits
 Colorado State Auditor's Office
 Georgia Performance Audit Operations, Department of Audits
 Hawaii Office of the Auditor
 Illinois Office of the Auditor General
 Kansas Legislative Division of Post Audit
 Louisiana Office of the Legislative Auditor
 Maryland Office of Legislative Audits
 Michigan Office of the Auditor General
 Minnesota Office of the Legislative Auditor
 Montana Legislative Audit Division
 Nevada Legislative Counsel Bureau
 New Hampshire Office of the Legislative Budget Assistant, Audit Division
 Texas State Auditor's Office
 Utah Office of the Legislative Auditor General
 West Virginia Performance Evaluation and Research Division
 Wisconsin Performance Audit Division, Wisconsin Legislative Audit Bureau

Type 2 - Legislative Offices Conducting Oversight Studies (22)

California Office of the Legislative Analyst
 Connecticut Office of Program Review and Investigations
 Florida Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability
 Idaho Office of Performance Evaluations
 Indiana Office of Fiscal and Management Analysis
 Iowa Legislative Fiscal bureau
 Kentucky Legislative Research Commission
 Maine Office of Program Evaluation and Government Accountability
 Mississippi Joint Legislative Committee on Performance Evaluation and Expenditure Review
 Missouri Oversight Division, Committee on Legislative Research
 Nebraska Legislative Program Evaluation Unit
 New Mexico Legislative Finance Committee
 North Carolina Fiscal Research Division
 North Dakota Legislative Council
 Ohio Legislative Office of Education Oversight*
 Pennsylvania Legislative Budget and Finance Committee
 South Carolina Legislative Audit Council
 Tennessee Research and Education Accountability
 Texas Sunset Advisory Committee
 Virginia Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee
 Washington Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee
 Wyoming Legislative Service Office

Source: Updated from Berry, F., J. Turcotte, and S. Latham "Program Evaluation in State Legislatures: Professional Services Delivered in a Complex, Competitive Environment." In: R. Mohan, D. Bernstein, and M. Whitsett (eds.), *New Directions for Evaluation* (95): 73—88.

*Office was eliminated in 2005.

The offices also vary in the professional standards that they have adopted. As noted by Klein (1999) and North (1990), such standards and norms are part of the institutional environment that can shape organizational behavior. The choice of standards adopted by the offices is highly influenced by their organizational status. Type 1 offices, due to their work conducting financial audits in addition to performance evaluations, have generally adopted the *Government Auditing Standards* promulgated by the U.S. Government Accountability Office.⁵ These Standards, sometimes called the *Yellow Book*, cover the conduct of both financial and performance audits (*Government Auditing Standards*, 2003).⁶ Some Type 2 legislative oversight offices have also adopted the *Yellow Book* standards, while others have either not adopted formal standards or follow alternatives such as *The Program Evaluation Standards* promulgated by the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation or the *Guiding Principles for Evaluation* promulgated by the American Evaluation Association (*The Program Evaluation Standards*, 1994; American Evaluation Association, 2006).⁷

While the prescriptions of *The Program Evaluation Standards* are similar to those of the *Government Auditing Standards* and the *Guiding Principles*, there are important differences between the sets of standards that can affect how legislative oversight offices interact with their parent state legislatures. The most critical of these differences is derived from the *Government Auditing Standards* Independence standard, which states that “Auditors should also be sufficiently removed from political pressures to ensure that they can conduct their audits

⁵ Use of the *Government Auditing Standards* is mandated by the federal government for audits of programs receiving federal funds. Type 1 organizations review their state’s use of federal funds under the Single Audit Act and are thus subject to this mandate.

⁶ The *Government Auditing Standards* establishes standards in four general areas—*Qualifications* (needed staff expertise), *Independence* (the unit and the staff conducting the audit must have both organizational and professional independence from the entity being audited); *Due Professional Care*, which address the procedures to be used in carrying out audit engagements, and *Quality Control*, addressing documentation and review requirements for audit engagements.

⁷ *The Program Evaluation Standards* are categorized into four areas: *Utility* - the evaluation should address stakeholder needs; *Feasibility* - the evaluation must be realistic, prudent, diplomatic, and frugal; *Propriety* - the evaluation must be conducted legally, ethically, and in due regard for the welfare of those involved; and *Accuracy* - the evaluation will provide technically adequate information (*The Program Evaluation Standards*, 1994). The *Guiding Principles for Evaluation* establish five overall principles - *Systematic Inquiry* - evaluators conduct systematic, data-based inquiries; *Competence* – evaluators provide competent performance to stakeholders; *Integrity/Honesty* – evaluators display honesty and integrity in their own behavior and attempt to ensure the honesty and integrity of the entire evaluation process; *Respect for People* – evaluators respect the security, dignity, and self-worth of respondents, program participants, clients, and other evaluation stakeholders; *Responsibilities for General and Public Welfare* – evaluators articulate and take into account the diversity of general and public interests and values that may be related to the evaluation (American Evaluation Association, 2006).

objectively and can report their findings without fear of political repercussion” (*Government Auditing Standards*, 2003, 49). This contrasts with *The Program Evaluation Standards*’ Utility standard, which emphasizes the importance of meeting stakeholders’ needs: “Persons involved in or affected by the evaluation should be identified, so that their needs can be addressed”, and “Evaluations should be planned, conducted, and reported in ways that encourage follow-through by stakeholders, so that the likelihood that the evaluation will be used is increased” (*The Program Evaluation Standards*, 1994, 25, 59). Similarly, the *Guiding Principles* similarly state that “Evaluators should negotiate honestly with clients and relevant stakeholders concerning the costs, tasks to be undertaken, limitations of methodology, scope of results likely to be obtained, and uses of data resulting from a specific evaluation. It is primarily the evaluator’s responsibility to initiate discussion and clarification of these matters, not the client’s” (American Evaluation Association, 2006). Thus, while *The Program Evaluation Standards* and the *Guiding Principles for Evaluators* encourage offices to establish strong network linkages to legislative stakeholders, the *Government Auditing Standards* can discourage this interaction in order to maximize organization independence. As we shall see, this difference can substantially affect the offices’ efforts to promote use of their work.

The activities and effectiveness of legislative oversight offices have not been extensively studied. Berry et al. (2002) reported historical and descriptive information about the offices, drawing primarily from the 2001 survey of these offices. In addition to developing the Type 1 and Type 2 classification system used in this study, the Berry et al. article also discussed the roles the offices play in the complex and challenging environment in which they operate.

Hird (2005) examined the activities of a broader group of legislative units—those that provide any type of research services to their parent legislatures. This population includes legislative oversight offices but also units that perform legal research, bill drafting, budget analysis, and general staff assistance to legislators. Hird’s study, which was based on a nationwide survey of such offices, evidently excluded many legislative oversight offices as he

classified only 11 states as having units that conducted substantial policy analysis and long-term analytical research.

Hird tested several hypotheses concerning the political environment in which legislative research offices operate. Specifically, he reported that

- States with strong political parties tend to have small legislative research offices that provide mostly descriptive rather than analytical research;
- States with a more moralistic political culture tend to have large legislative research offices that do more analytical work;
- States with relatively liberal policy environments tend to have legislative research offices that do more analytical work (although not necessarily larger offices);
- Larger and more analytical legislative research offices were associated with states with more private think tanks;
- Legislatures that employed more staff per legislator were more likely to have large and analytically oriented research offices;
- More professional legislatures (with larger staff and more full-time members) were more likely to have larger research offices (but not more analytical ones);
- Larger legislative research offices are found in more states with larger economies, but not necessarily those with the largest per capita wealth.

Hird found no relationship between the size and activities of legislative research offices and political party competition, unified government (the legislature and governor controlled by a single party), interest group strength, or the institutional strength of governors.

Hird also surveyed legislators regarding their opinions of the work of the legislative research offices and concluded that “although legislators value [the offices] highly, and rate them highly for their ability to gather information and perform short-term analysis, they do not view them as influential in the policymaking process, nor do they credit them with bringing new ideas or fresh

perspectives to policymakers” (Hird, 2005, 158). However, Hird also asserted that

“Their relationship to power and expertise and expertise has allowed [them] to become influential in some sense but only in ways congenial to legislative demands for neutrality. Their power, mostly as information providers, has come at the expense of independence—they provide useful information and remain trusted advisors—but at the heavy cost of losing the ability to challenge prevailing norms and bring new ideas, perspectives, and analysis to the legislative milieu” (Hird, 2005, xv).

This study applies portions of Hird’s research design to legislative oversight offices, including the political environmental variables that he found to be relevant and several survey questions he used relating to how the work of the offices was valued by stakeholders. This allows for comparison of this study’s results with Hird’s conclusions about a broader group of legislative research units.

Normative impacts of the field’s history

The historical development of the field of policy analysis and evaluation, particularly within legislative oversight offices, has greatly influenced its practice. Specifically, the field’s roots in the public administration orthodoxy period contributed to its ongoing emphasis on rational decision making with efficiency as a major normative goal, while the behavioral revolution period in which it flowered bequeathed its emphasis on ‘objective’ value-free analysis of policy issues through the application of rigorous methods.

In essence, the field has tended to view policy issues as engineering problems to be solved through systematic and dispassionate research, and it is deeply influenced by rational choice theory. Under this conceptualization, policymakers seek to maximize utility, both for their own political benefit as well as to attain broader policy goals. Policymakers are assumed to have relatively

fixed personal and policy preferences, and will seek to adopt choices that maximize attainment of these preferences. While they are subject to bounded rationality, policy makers call for evaluations and policy analyses to be done because they recognize that they lack sufficient information about the consequences of their past decisions and the alternatives that are now available to them. The fact that they call for these studies to be done is evidence that they intend to use their results; as policymakers recognize opportunity costs they will seek out such information only to the extent that its benefits outweighs the cost of doing so. The information produced by the evaluations and policy analyses can thus be seen as an instrument designed and desired by policymakers to help them attain their desired ends (Shulock, 1996).

The job of policy analysts and evaluators in this paradigm is to provide this information to policymakers by conducting high quality research. The policy problems being examined are assumed to be appropriate subjects for systematic and objective analysis, meaning that evaluators and policy analysts can collect and sort out the information desired by policymakers by using appropriate research methods. Based on the scientific method and the classic problem-solving model, evaluators and analysts are assumed to have the ability to identify and rank policymakers' preferences (e.g., the desired goals and objectives of programs), collect and analyze reasonably complete information about current program and policy conditions, identify a reasonably complete set of policy options, weigh the relative benefits of each of these options against the established criteria, and as a result of this analysis identify the option(s) that will best maximize the policymakers' utility. The intended outcome of this effort is that policy analysis and evaluation reports will help policymakers clarify their goals and identify and assess their available alternatives to solving policy problems (Lasswell, 1971).

This perspective can be seen in historical and current definitions of policy analysis and evaluation. Thomas Dye's widely used policy textbook from the 1970s defines policy analysis as involving

- “(1) a primary concern with explanation rather than prescription. ...
- (2) A rigorous search for the causes and consequences of public policies. This search involves the use of scientific standards of inference. ...
- (3) An effort to develop and test general propositions about the causes and consequences of public policy and to accumulate reliable research findings of general relevance “(Dye, 1978, 7).

“Policy analysis [is] to employ the scientific techniques culled from a variety of disciplines to model objective reality, amass knowledge of cause and effects of policy, and solve problems” (Shulock, 1996, 19); it is a “systematic comparison and evaluation of alternatives available to public actors for solving social problems” (Weimer and Vining, 1999, 30). Similarly, “the purpose of evaluation research is to measure the effects of a program against the goals it set out to accomplish as a means of contributing to the subsequent decision making about the program and improving future programming (Weiss, 1972, 4), and evaluation is “the systematic collection of information about the activities, characteristics, and outcomes of programs to make judgments about the program, improve program effectiveness, and/or inform decisions about future programming” (Patton, 1997, 23).

This orientation is rooted in the public administration orthodoxy period’s desire to improve and rationalize government administration. For example, Wilson’s classical statement on the purpose of studying administration that “It is the object of administrative study to discover, first, what government can properly and successfully do, and secondly, how it can do these proper things with the utmost possible efficiency and the least possible cost of money or of energy” (Wilson, 1887, 14), fits well with the above definitions of policy analysis and evaluation.

This orientation has provided a strong normative foundation to the field and the work of legislative oversight offices. The field and the offices have a strong focus on attaining efficiency outcomes, and much current policy analysis theory is based on the application of economic principles. For example, Weimer

and Vining's popular text *Policy Analysis Concept and Practice* is based almost entirely on the concept that analysts should approach policy issues using market concepts. However, the field's orientation also has an inherent *Field of Dreams* perspective—that if analysts and evaluators produce information, policymakers will seek it out and use it to improve their decisions and operations—that has contributed to the utilization challenges that have faced both the overall field and legislative oversight offices since they were established.

Criticism of founding principles

The field's emphasis on providing support to decision-makers through rigorous value-free analysis has led to several theoretical and philosophical criticisms of its tenets and approaches. First, several authors assert that policy analyses and evaluations that are geared towards meeting the information needs of policymakers have the effect of reinforcing the status quo at the expense of those lacking such power. These authors assert that these studies are thus inherently anti-democratic and seek to substitute analysis for the democratic process through which conflicting policy claims should be decided (Fisher, 2000; deLeon, 1997; Stone, 1997; Dryzeck, 1989).

Second, studies that seek to determine if programs' stated goals are being efficiently achieved have been criticized for ignoring the fact that program goals stated in enabling legislation are often vague and conflicting and may not represent the true intentions of the elites that control government. While the generally accepted paradigm of evaluation and policy analysis assumes that it is relatively straightforward to identify and rank policy and program goals, which is needed in order to decide whether programs are successful in achieving these outcomes, this is often impossible in practice. As a result, evaluation and policy analysis results are often open to widely conflicting interpretations. For example, an evaluation may conclude that a program is not achieving its intended goals. Persons who oppose the program on ideological or political grounds may claim that the study proves that the program is a failure and should be eliminated, while program supporters may instead claim that the study only shows that the

program needs more time to demonstrate its value and/or that additional funding is needed in order for the program to reach its potential (deHaven-Smith, 1988).

Third, critics have asserted that the concept that analysts and evaluators can provide value-free objective research is naïve because true impartiality is impossible to attain (Lindbloom, 1986) and the attempt to do so is mere “metaphysical madness” (Banfield, 1980). While the traditional positivist perspective of evaluation and policy analysis assumes that there is set of objective truths that can be discovered by careful research, this more sociological perspective argues that there are instead multiple (or no) truths that exist, depending on the perspectives of different individuals and interests within the interactive systems that are affected by a program (Conner, 1998). These authors assert that program evaluators and policy analysts should abandon their mistaken belief that they can and should provide ‘objective and neutral’ research. Instead, researchers should pick a side and use their research results to advance their concept of the public interest. These authors thus assert that the technocratic approach of the field envisioned by Lasswell should be replaced by a more democratic process in which partisans develop and communicate alternative versions of policy reality that will then be fought out in the political marketplace.

Limited use of evaluation and policy analysis

In reality, both the dream that policy analysis and evaluation will rationalize policymaking and the fear that it will produce undemocratic philosopher kings have been belayed by the recognition that such studies have not had a predominate impact on the policy process, including studies produced by legislative oversight offices.

Beginning in the late 1960s—soon after the field developed—a litany of researchers noted that policymakers often did not use the results of policy analysis and evaluation studies. “The history of ... research to date has been disappointing. Few examples can be cited of important contributions to policy

and program” (Weiss, 1972, 3). “The recent literature is unanimous in announcing the general failure of evaluation to affect decision making in a significant way” (Wholey et al., 1970, 46); “on those rare occasions when evaluation studies have been used... use has been fortuitous rather than planned” (Weidman, 1973, 15). There is “little evidence to indicate that government [has] succeeded in linking social research and decision making” (Cohen and Garet, 1975, 19). “The impact of research on the most important aspects of the state was, with few exceptions, nil” (Deitchman, 1976, 390). “It has proved very difficult to uncover many instances where social science research has had a clear and direct impact on policy even when it has been specifically commissioned by government” (Sharpe, 1977, 45). The Government Accountability Office reported in 1995 that Congress often did not use the results of its evaluation studies, and some authors have reported that legislative use of evaluation studies at the federal level has in fact declined over time (Chelimsky, 1994; Wargo, 1995). “To the extent that the American political system allows for the consideration of interests other than those of the politically and economically privileged, does policy analysis play a role? Does policy analysis help solve social problems as it was intended to do? Two decades of research tell us the answer is ‘no’ (Shulock, 1996). This widespread criticism of evaluation and policy analysis indicates that the role of these studies is often seen as that of a voice crying in the wilderness rather than as an effective policymaking resource.

Alternative concepts of use

This depressing assessment is due in part to an overly narrow perspective on what constitutes ‘use’ of policy analyses and evaluations. Early studies of research use tended to focus on whether the specific recommendations of individual studies had been implemented by policymakers, and these studies generally concluded that such impact did not occur, at least in the short term (Weiss, 1998). For example, a major study of research utilization conducted in 1973 and 1974 involved surveying 204 federal officials regarding how they used social science research in their policy decision making; these officials reported

virtually no examples of making policy decisions based on the results of individual research studies (Caplan, et al., 1975).

However, more recent authors have argued there are many types of use of evaluations and policy analyses, and that some use occurs only over a long period of time. A series of authors (Shadish, 1987; Weiss, 1980, 1990, 1998; Whiteman, 1995; Patton, 1997; Henry, 2003; Henry and Mark, 2003; Johnson, 2003) have proposed four general categories of use.

Instrumental use

In this type of use, policymakers are directly influenced by research findings and as a result take specific actions such as modifying or eliminating a program. Instrumental use is the holy grail of evaluations and policy analyses, as it occurs when policymakers implement the recommendations of these studies. However, some authors assert that instrumental use is common only in highly constrained conditions—when findings are relatively non-controversial; they require only small-scale changes that are within the control and normal operations of a program; and the environment of the program is relatively stable (Weiss, 1998).⁸

Process use

In this type of use, the research findings do not affect decision makers but instead aid in organizational learning. Policy analyses and evaluations help program staff that participate in the studies gain new help insights into the strengths and weaknesses of current options and possible alternatives, which can in time lead to instrumental use. By being involved in these studies, program staff learn to think like analysts and evaluators and gain skills in critical thinking and process mapping, which in turn can result in improved organizational commitment, communication, and decision-making (Johnson, 1998). Process

⁸ These constraints on implementation are similar to those posited under population ecology theory, which holds that organizations face substantial limits on their ability to adapt due to sunk costs, limitations on the information received by the organization and its ability to process this information, internal politics, inertia created by existing policies and procedures, legal requirements, and legitimacy constraints (Hannan and Freeman, 1977).

use also can be seen as a form of sociological sensemaking in that by working together to carry out evaluations and policy analyses, program participants develop a shared understand what is going on in their program (Mark et al., 1999; Preskill et al., 2003).

Legitimization or symbolic use

In this third type of use, research results are used to mobilize support for already existing positions. The studies can be used by internal program managers to show the legitimacy of their current operations, as well as by external advocates and decision-makers as ammunition supporting their policy preferences and to justify actions that they already planned to take. This type of use can help explain the widely different interpretations that are sometimes given to evaluation and policy analysis findings by program supporters and opponents (deHaven-Smith, 1998). Evaluation and policy analysis findings in this type of use become ‘instruments of persuasion’ rather than an independent source for policy change (Weiss, 1998, 24). Reflecting the disdain of politics that is rooted in the public administration orthodoxy, some authors have decried such use as illegitimate ‘mis-use’ (Cousin, 2004) or ‘conspiratorial’ use (Huberman, 1987). However, this use is fairly common (Pelz, 1978), and one study concluded that Congress’ use of policy analyses and evaluations was primarily as legitimization (Shulock, 1999).

Enlightenment use

In this final type of evaluation use, policy analysis and evaluation results, together with an accumulation of similar study results, are a source of learning that can influence slowly policy over time (Ginsburg and Rhett, 2003). In this type of use, research results are used by policy entrepreneurs and advocates to help raise policy issues and shape issue agendas. The new information produced by policy analyses and evaluations is slowly incorporated into the belief structure of the issue networks, advocacy coalitions, and policy monopolies that control policy arenas through a process of policy-oriented learning. The results can affect virtually aspects of the policy cycle, including opinions about the

importance of an issue (Henry and Gordon, 2001), the desirability of creating programs to address an issue (Greenberg et al., 2000), and assessments of whether programs are successful or alternative policy approaches should be adopted. The role of policy analysts and evaluators can shift materially in this concept of use, as rather than simply being neutral researchers they serve and can become members of advocacy coalitions along with legislators, agency administrators, and interest groups (Sabatier, 1991; Baumgartner and Jones, 1993; Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1999).

These broader concepts of use indicate that the utilization problem may not be as dire as initially feared. In fact, as Shulock discussed in her dissertation and subsequent article “If Policy Analysis Isn’t Used, Why Do We Do So Much of It?”, the fact that society invests increasing resources in the production of policy analyses and evaluations is evidence that these products are in fact valued and used (Shulock, 1999). Nonetheless, the generally accepted lack of instrumental use of evaluations and policy analyses indicates that these products face substantial barriers to their intended use.

Barriers to use

Researchers have identified numerous barriers to use of policy analysis and evaluation, regardless of what type of use is to be attained. Several of these barriers are intrinsic to efforts to impose a rationalistic paradigm on human and organizational decision making, while others are particularly relevant to the legislative environment in which these studies are intended to be used.

A primary rationale given for the limited use of evaluations and policy analyses is that researchers and policymakers operate in different paradigms that are largely incommensurable (Snow, 1961). Under this two communities perspective, researchers and policymakers have different values, communication styles, reward systems, and decision making styles. Policymakers operate in a fast-paced system and must make immediate decisions based on direct and highly focused information that is often incomplete. In contrast, researchers tend

to do long term studies that examine issues in depth yet often lack a topical focus on immediate decision points. While policymakers want discrete answers that can be reduced to sound bites, researchers tend to focus on nuance and caveats and often communicate in a highly theoretical style, when they can produce a definitive answer at all (Krugman, 1995). As noted by James Q. Wilson, “On any given topic that has become a crisis, the amount of extant, policy-relevant, well-done social science research is just about zero” (Wilson, 1978, 85).

Policymakers facing an immediate vote on a policy or budget proposal are unlikely to go to a researcher for information if they are told that getting a good answer would take a year. As a result, the research community is unable to capture the attention or trust of policymakers (Caplan, 1979).

A second rationale for limited use of policy analysis and evaluation is that the rational decision model presumed by the field does not match actual policymaking. Much utilization research has sought evidence of dramatic changes in policy after release of a policy analysis or evaluation report such as major restructuring or elimination of a program, assuming that policymakers will judge the report’s findings to be so overwhelming that it will outweigh all other values and evidence they will consider in their assessment of a policy problem and its alternative solutions. However, in reality much policymaking is incremental and involves small changes to existing budgets and operations rather than dramatic departures from the status quo due to many factors, including political support for the existing program operations and the difficulties of policy change (Lindbloom, 1959). Further, policymakers typically make decisions based on their past experiences, beliefs, and values rather than a single piece of new evidence such as an evaluation or policy analysis report, and they subject such evidence to both ‘truth tests’ that determine if the information conforms to their existing beliefs as well as a ‘utility tests’ that determine if the findings and recommendations from the report are feasible to implement (Haskins, 2002; Weiss and Bucuvalas, 1980). As a result, information from a policy analysis or evaluation report that conflicts with policymakers’ prior experience, values, and/or organizational schemata “is likely to be rejected,

misinterpreted, or set aside until that experience is re-shaped by the accumulation of like information over time” (Shulock, 1995, 37).

A third rationale for the limited use of policy analysis and evaluation in legislative settings is that legislators often are not focused on policy decisions or oversight of the executive branch but instead concentrate their efforts on distributive political activities that support their re-election efforts, namely constituent services and ‘bringing home the bacon’. As defined by Lowi, distributive politics involves targeting policies and programs to specific populations, particularly those that provide concentrated benefits to recipients while the costs of these benefits are diffused and paid by the general population (Lowi, 1964).⁹ Distributive theory holds that legislators are rational actors motivated primarily by their desire for re-election, which they pursue through providing benefits to their constituents. Legislators seek out assignments to committees that provide opportunities to provide distributive benefits for their districts, and engage in log-rolling to obtain the votes needed to secure these benefits (Shepsle and Weingast, 1987; Shepsle, 1979). Policy analysis and evaluation in distributive policymaking is thus often seen as inconsequential unless it helps legislators secure distributive benefits or at least claim credit for them; generally, Congress can’t and doesn’t use policy analysis (Jones, 1976).

Further, when legislators do make policy decisions, they often weigh political factors more highly than evidence produced by policy analyses and evaluations. One author has concluded that “the role of Congress is to evaluate the political strengths of various viewpoints, to assign political measures to the intangible and otherwise unquantifiable factors that make the decision controversial, and to arrive at either a political victory or a compromise that will result in a feasible and legitimate policy” (Dryfus, 1977, 103). As a result, legislators may chose a policy choice that will gain them political support despite research reports that shows that it would impose net costs to the broader society

⁹ Lowi categorized policies as distributed, redistributive, and regulatory. Redistributive policies involve the transfer of benefits from one broad group to another, while regulatory policies involve raising costs or reducing alternatives of persons and entities in specific sectors (Lowi, 1964).

(Haveman, 1976). Legislative interest in oversight of existing policies and programs is weak because this activity generally produces few political benefits and runs the risks of upsetting the interests that succeeded in gaining approval of these functions. Horn (1995, 69) concluded that “the empirical literature is dominated by the conclusion that legislative monitoring and oversight are neglected, weak, and ineffective”.

While this perspective is persuasive, it should be remembered not all legislative actions and decisions involves distributional politics—Lowi’s typology specifically notes that some decisions are redistributive and regulatory in nature. Policy analysis and evaluation may well play a larger role in such policymaking. This is an important point, as much evaluation and policy analysis is conducted on social programs that are inherently redistributive as well as on regulatory governmental activities. Much of the early work in evaluation, in fact, involved assessments of redistributive Great Society welfare programs, and there is some evidence that evaluation and policy analysis have a greater use in these policy areas, at least in an indirect way through policy learning. For example, one observer of federal welfare reform initiatives reported that “social science research contributed substantially to creating the policy conditions in which welfare reform became possible” (Haskins, 1991, 628).

Research findings may also play a larger role in policy arenas that have high levels of conflict. As noted by McCool, different policy arenas—which have variously been defined as subsystems, issue networks, advocacy coalitions, policy monopolies, and policy networks—can be characterized as having very different levels of political conflict between participants, ranging from exclusionary politics in which one side is so powerful as to effectively exclude its opponents from policy decisions to competitive confrontation politics in which there is continual conflict between relatively equally powerful interests in policymaking (McCool, 1998). It is thus likely that the role of policy analysis and evaluation is greater in policy arenas with higher levels of conflict as there exists more opportunities for strategic use of information to claim that existing policies are or are not effective in these arenas and thus promote (or oppose) policy

change. However, there is as yet no empirical evidence of such differences, and it is likely that legislators often are motivated by incentives other than maximizing 'good policy' through the judicious application of policy analysis and evaluation studies.

A fourth challenge that is particularly relevant to legislative oversight offices seeking use of their research products is the nature of the legislative environment in which they work. These offices seek to provide useful information to elected legislators, yet these officials are continually surrounded by distractions and massive amounts of information that are being provided by other entities including lobbyists, other legislative staff, and the media (Arinder, 1997; Whiteman, 1995). The legislative environment is also an oral culture in which personal relationships and anecdotal stories are very influential (Weiss, 1989, Whiteman, 1995). The pace of legislative decision-making is rapid and the timing of information provision is often essential to its impact on policymaking (Zajano and Lochetfeld, 1997). To have impact, policy analyses and evaluation studies must thus be of high interest to key legislative stakeholders who must be primed to receive the information. The studies must also be convincing enough to break through the noise of competing information yet be readily accessible to policymakers with little time for reading technical reports; the studies must also be timed to meet narrow windows of potential use.

Further, the political environment in which the offices operate has undergone major structural changes in recent years. Over the past 10 years, a historic shift has occurred in party control of state legislatures. While the majority of state legislatures formerly had been under the control of the Democratic Party for decades, during the late 1990s and early 2000s the Republican Party captured the majority of state legislative seats and control of legislative chambers for the first time since 1954 (NCSL, 2004a). Also, term limits took effect in 15 state legislatures, which forced out many long-standing legislative members (NCSL, 2004c). These changes in party control and the substantially increased turnover in legislative seats create a 'punctuated equilibrium' situation in which existing policy relationships are overturned (Kingdom, 1984; Baumgartner and

Jones, 1993). Research has shown that after changes in party control, state legislators in the new majority tend to view existing staff with suspicion and often reduce legislative staffing (VanLandingham, 2005). For legislative oversight offices, these changes often have the effect of disrupting long-standing contacts with networks of key legislative stakeholders who understand and support their work.

The imposition of legislative term limits also has had the effect of reducing legislative support for the function of the oversight offices themselves. As noted by a recent study of the impact of legislative term limits, “one of the clearest effects of term limits has been to weaken legislatures at the expense of executives” (Powell, forthcoming, 167), and “under term limits, oversight functions have suffered greatly. As time passes and institutional memory declines, the danger is that legislatures will no longer appreciate what has been lost” (Powell, forthcoming, 181). This occurs because term limits lead to diminished legislative understanding of government structures, lower willingness to challenge the executive branch, and a reduced sensitivity to the need to defend legislative prerogatives (Kurtz, Cain, and Niemi, forthcoming). Oversight offices in term limited states thus face major tests in both maintaining effective networks with legislators to promote use of their work and in promoting the value of their function itself.

A fifth challenge facing policy analysts and evaluators in seeking legislative use of their work is competition from other sources of policy information. While there were relatively few sources of these studies when the field was being established in the 1960s and 1970s, this is no longer the case. Over the past 30 years, there has been a virtual explosion of policy outlets, as hundreds of public and private think tanks have been created that produce studies that seek to influence the policy process (Rich, 2006). Some of these policy outlets also seek to influence legislators through additional means including links to organizations that raise campaign contributions, strategies that are closed to legislative evaluators and policy analysts.

Prescriptions to promote use

While the barriers to utilization are substantial, many authors studying use of policy analyses and evaluations have proposed strategies that legislative oversight offices can take to address these challenges. These actions can be categorized into two overall strategies—(1) establishing strong networks with key legislative stakeholders to identify what information is needed so that their studies can meet these needs and (2) designing and marketing their products to promote ready use within the legislative environment.^{10 11}

Developing networks with legislative stakeholders

A great deal of attention has been given in recent years to the importance of network connections between organizations. These networks are critical to information exchange and organizational learning—“... it is through networks of people who regard each other as knowledgeable, or at least needing to be answered, that public policy issues to be refined, evidence debated, and alternative options worked out” (Heclo, 1987, as cited in Schneider et al, 2003, 143). Networks create ‘weak and strong ties’ that are critical to disseminating information between different groups (Granovetter, 1973). These networks “allow individuals to make mutually beneficial exchanges and agreements” and “enhance the likelihood and scope of policy agreements by increasing available information about potential agreements and enhancing the credibility of commitments to fulfill the agreements” (Schneider et al. 2003, 144). In addition to promoting information exchange, this interaction helps to establish trust between legislative stakeholders and oversight offices and enhance the credibility of research products (Taut and Akin, 2003). As discussed by Preskill

¹⁰ These strategies can be seen as efforts to address transactions costs that parallel those of the offices’ parent legislatures—limited information about key legislative stakeholders’ need for oversight data and a commitment challenges pertaining to obtaining legislative adoption and use of this information.

¹¹ Other factors have also been deemed important to research utilization, such as providing high-quality policy analysis and evaluation reports in order to gain stakeholder confidence in the credibility of findings (Weiss, 1998; Taut and Akin, 2003); however, following prior research this study presumes that the research standards adopted by legislative oversight offices (highly structured research processes and metaevaluation peer reviews of products) helps ensure research quality (Datta, 2000) and that the networking and marketing strategies that are measured in this study will be, if followed, effective in establishing stakeholder confidence in the work produced by oversight offices.

et al. (2003), this collaboration also promotes organizational learning as “social constructivist learning theory ... suggests that individuals construct knowledge and develop a shared reality through collaboration with others” (Preskill et al. 2003, 424).

These networks are particularly important in the legislative environment, as legislators and their staff tend to rely on insider sources close to the process rather than outside information sources (Mooney, 1991)—“The role of policy analysis [is] clearly enhanced by the personal relationships between staff members and analysts and ... the information communicated through these channels” (Whitman, 1995, 182).

Policy analysts and evaluators using this strategy work to create open communication channels with key legislative stakeholders to ensure that their products meet the needs of these stakeholders. However, doing so often requires a conscious decision by office leadership, as it takes time and effort to develop and maintain these network contacts; time spent ‘schmoozing’ with legislators and their key staff is time that cannot be spent on other critical tasks such as carrying out oversight studies (Schneider et al., 2003).

Research utilization scholars assert that this stakeholder input should be obtained in all phases of oversight studies (see Neilsen, 1976; Cox, 1977, Patton et al, 1978, 1997; Turcotte, 1979; Havens, 1981; Wollenberg, 1986; Green, 1988; Boyer, 1989; Boyer and Langbein, 1991; Lipton, 1992; Chelimsky, 1994; Bell, 1994; Sonnichsen, 1994; Carter, 1994; Weiss, 1998; Datta, 2000; Grasso, 2003; Preskill et al., 2003). Thus, program evaluators and policy analysts should seek legislative stakeholder input regarding

- (1) *what agencies and programs should be studied;*
- (2) *what specific issues should be addressed* in the studies;
- (3) *what research designs should be used* to ensure that the results will be seen as credible;

- (4) *how recommendations should be presented* (e.g., should draft legislation be provided to aid in implementing the recommendations); and
- (5) *when report findings and recommendations are needed*.

It is also important to *periodically brief legislators and key staff on research progress*, in order to promote buy-in and ensure that the studies remain targeted at critical legislative information needs, which may change during the course of the study.

Marketing and designing user-friendly products

A great deal of research also has been done to identify actions that evaluators and policy analysts should take to help ensure that their work gains the attention of and can readily be used by legislative stakeholders. Recommended steps include those described below.

(1) *Produce credible research within short time periods* (see Lipton, 1992; Hendricks, 1994; Chelimsky, 1994; Zajano et al, 1997; Love, 2001; Berry et al, 2002). As many legislative issues arise and must be resolved within short time periods, policy analyst and evaluators should have a demonstrated capacity to conduct provide information within short deadlines to meet these needs.

(2) *Communicate findings in multiple formats that quickly communicate key points to busy legislators and key staff* (see Cox, 1977; Hawkins et al., 1978; Turcotte, 1979; Green, 1984; Lipton, 1992; Hendricks, 1994; Carter, 1994; Chelimsky, 1994; Sonnichsen, 1994; Zajano et al., 1999; Berry, et al., 2002; Grasso, 2003; Preskill et al., 2003). Recommended steps include producing short reports with summaries of key findings; providing findings through alternate communication modes such as audio tapes, videotapes, and PowerPoint presentations in addition to written reports; and promoting media coverage of findings through steps such as issuing press releases and holding press conferences. Providing 'stories' in reports and in testimony that illustrate critical

research findings as well as statistical data is also important to making the findings real and understandable to both staff and legislators.

(3) *Provide actionable recommendations* (see Carter, 1979; Lipton, 1992; Hendricks, 1994; Sonnichsen, 1994). For legislative use to occur, evaluations and policy analyses must produce recommendations for actions that legislatures can in fact carry out. Legislatures have two primary tools to effect policy change—amending statutes and appropriating funds. While legislators may be interested in recommendations for changes in agency operations, they have a limited capability to mandate administrative details that are within the executive branch’s jurisdiction. Policy analyses and evaluations that focus solely on agency internal operations and produce recommendations such as modifying procedure manuals or providing additional staff training are unlikely to achieve substantive legislative interest and use. It is also important to provide actionable recommendations in a format that is readily used by legislators and staff such as draft bill language that modifies specific sections of statutes and the estimated appropriations impact of proposed policy changes.

(4) *Periodically remind legislators and key staff of non-implemented prior recommendations* (see Craft, 1979; Carter, 1994; and Hendricks, 1994; Datta, 2000). Policy analysts and evaluators can extend the shelf life of their work by periodically reminding legislative stakeholders of prior findings and recommendations. For example, this can be done by publishing annual lists of non-implemented recommendations to bring this information back before legislators when timing may be more suitable for implementation.

(5) *Conduct periodic follow-up studies to determine if issues addressed in prior reports have been resolved* (see Sonnichsen, 1994). One of the ongoing challenges facing legislatures is that agencies may appear to accept oversight findings and agree to implement recommendations but then fail to do so. Follow-up studies that determine if recommendations have actually been implemented can help legislatures close this loop as well as provide assurance that underlying problems have been ameliorated.

It should be noted that although legislative oversight offices are “obsessed with utilization” (Jonas, 1997), they may face practical barriers to adopting some of these utilization strategies. These caveats include internal constraints such as limited time and resources as well as institutional barriers. For example, oversight offices may lack the staffing needed to conduct follow-up studies in addition to their ongoing evaluation assignments, and may lack the technical expertise needed to create video presentations of research findings. The political environment in which the offices operate can also restrict their ability to promote their work, as legislators in some states may view these steps as undue lobbying by staff that are expected to stay in the background. For example, holding press conferences to publicize report findings may be prohibited in some states in order to avoid placing pressure on legislators to adopt recommendations. Further, the institutional norms that the offices have adopted may limit their willingness to take proactive approaches to working with legislative stakeholders and aggressively marking their work. These caveats will be explored in this study’s research hypotheses.

Hypotheses

This study will test hypotheses in four areas—(1) the legislative oversight offices’ adoption of the utilization strategies proposed by theory, (2) the resources granted to the offices by their parent legislatures; (3) the political culture in which the offices operate; and (4) key legislative stakeholders’ perceptions of the value and use of the work of the legislative oversight offices.

Adoption of utilization strategies by oversight offices

H₁: Type 1 legislative oversight offices will have lower utilization strategy scores than Type 2 offices.

H₂: Type 1 legislative oversight offices that have a higher proportion of their staff allocated to financial auditing will have lower utilization strategy scores than will those Type 1 offices with a higher proportion of staff allocated to program evaluations.

H₃: Legislative oversight offices that do not conduct financial audits but have nonetheless have adopted the *Government Auditing Standards* will have lower utilization strategy scores than will offices that adopted other evaluation standards.

These hypotheses test the impact of the evaluation standards on the behavior of legislative oversight offices, including their networking, marketing, and overall actions to promote utilization. The first hypothesis proposes that due largely to the Independence auditing standard offices that have adopted the *Government Auditing Standards* will tend to limit their interaction with their parent legislatures in order to maintain their organizational independence. Hypothesis 2 proposes that this impact will be greatest in those offices with a primary focus on financial auditing, which generally does not require legislative stakeholder interaction (as the primary focus of financial audits is to test financial records for adherence to generally accepted accounting principles). Oversight offices that have a relative balance of financial auditing and program evaluation duties are expected to be more mindful of the need to promote utilization and be more willing to invest in strategies to increase use than those units that have a strong focus on financial auditing and whose other oversight responsibilities are tangential. The third hypothesis proposes that even in the absence of a financial audit orientation by top management, legislative oversight offices that have adopted the *Government Auditing Standards* will nonetheless will tend to adopt conservative utilization strategies compared to those units that are unconstrained by the *Government Auditing Standards*' Independence standard.

Resource outcomes

H₄. Legislative oversight offices with lower utilization strategy scores will have negative resource growth rates compared to offices with higher utilization strategy scores.

H₅. Legislative oversight offices with lower utilization strategy scores will be more likely to face threats to eliminate, substantially downsize, or merge the unit with some other entity compared to offices with higher utilization strategy scores.

H₆. Oversight offices serving legislatures which have recently experienced changes in party leadership will have negative resource outcomes compared to offices serving legislatures that have not experienced party control changes.

H₇. Oversight offices with a greater number of staff will have higher utilization strategy scores than offices with lower numbers of staff.

These hypotheses propose that the utilization strategies will produce tangible outcomes for the legislative oversight offices. As noted by Williamson, “governance structures that have better transaction cost economizing properties will eventually displace those that have worse” (Williamson, 1981, 574). Thus, legislative oversight entities that are reluctant to reach out to their key legislative stakeholders and take steps to maximize use of their work may pay a penalty in resource competition. These offices will have weak networks connections, which are particularly important as they serve to link organizations to entities [their parent legislatures] that can provide resources, credibility, and legitimacy (Galaskiewicz and Bielefeld, 1998). Following organizational selection theory, this weakness is expected to manifest itself through a Darwinian selection mechanism in that offices that have characteristics that best fit their environment will have competitive advantages over those entities that have characteristics that are not in harmony with environmental pressures (Hannan and Freeman, 1977, 1989; Amburgey and Rao, 1996); such offices will have a positive fit with their environment survive and thrive, while those that do not fit may fail.

Hypothesis 4 proposes that oversight offices that take more steps to form networks with legislative stakeholders and market their work will, due to the greater utility of their work for their parent legislatures in an era of increasing competition for policy attention, be rewarded with greater staffing over time. In contrast, those offices which tend to take fewer such steps will be at a disadvantage in resource competition over time and their staffing levels will either grow more slowly or decline relative to offices that have higher utilization strategy scores. Hypothesis 5 proposes that offices with low strategy scores will be more

vulnerable to paying the penalty of being substantially downsized, eliminated, or merged with another entity.

Hypothesis 6 posits that punctuated equilibrium situations (e.g., changes in party control) will negatively affect the resources of oversight offices despite their efforts to interact with stakeholders, as the offices will lose political support when a new policy monopoly assumes power. Prior research indicates that overall legislative staffing tends to decline following changes in party control (VanLandingham, 2005), and it is likely that this trend will affect the oversight offices as well.

Finally, Hypothesis 7 predicts that larger oversight offices will have higher utilization strategy scores, both because these offices have larger levels of resources to dedicate to networking and marketing activities and also because they will tend to be rewarded with resources by their legislatures due to their effective working relationships with key legislative stakeholders.

Political environment

H₈. Oversight offices serving legislatures with larger numbers of professional staff will have higher utilization strategy scores than offices serving legislatures with small numbers of staff.

H₉. Oversight offices serving legislatures in states with a large number of private think tanks will have higher utilization strategy scores than offices in states with small numbers of think tanks.

H₁₀. Oversight offices serving legislatures in states with a liberal policy environment will have higher utilization strategy scores than offices serving legislatures with less liberal policy environment.

H₁₁. Oversight offices serving legislatures in states with a high gross state product will have higher utilization strategy scores than offices serving legislatures in states with a low gross state product.

H₁₂. Oversight offices serving legislatures in states with strong political parties will have higher utilization strategy scores than offices serving legislatures with weaker parties.

H₁₃. Oversight offices serving legislatures in states with a moralistic political culture will have higher utilization strategy scores than offices serving legislatures with individualist and traditional political cultures.

H₁₄. Oversight offices serving legislatures in states that have imposed legislative term limits will have higher utilization strategy scores than offices serving legislatures that are not subject to term limits.

H₁₅. Oversight offices serving professional legislatures will have higher utilization strategy scores than offices serving citizen or hybrid legislatures.

These hypotheses test the application of the variables that Hird (2005) found to be significant in explaining the size and functions of overall state legislative research offices (see discussion on pages 14 to 16) to the utilization strategies of legislative oversight offices. The posited direction of these relationships is the same as that found by Hird. The general theory behind these hypotheses is that offices facing a more problematic political culture due to the existence of a large number of other legislative staff (Hypotheses 8) and private think tanks (Hypothesis 9) will respond by increasing their efforts to interact with their parent legislatures in order to gain attention, legitimacy, and political support. Hypotheses 10 through 13 assess whether the political culture variables (policy liberalism, state wealth, party strength, and political culture) found by Hird to be related to larger staff in nonpartisan research organizations will also be related to assertive efforts by oversight offices to form networks and market their work. Finally Hypotheses 14 and 15 predict that differences in legislative institutions will be related to oversight offices' utilization activities. Hypothesis 14 predicts that offices serving term limited legislatures will have higher utilization scores due to the need to reach out to temporary membership and leadership in these states, while hypothesis 15 predicts that oversight offices serving professional legislature that have full-time members will have higher utilization scores reflecting both the easier task such offices face in establishing strong working relationships with legislators who are frequently at the capital as well as these member's presumed higher demand for information relevant to their ongoing policy and budget debates.

Impact of utilization strategies on stakeholder value and use

H₁₆: Legislative stakeholders will view oversight offices with high utilization strategy scores as more valuable in the legislative process than oversight offices with lower utilization strategy scores.

H₁₇: Legislative stakeholders will not view the credibility of information produced by oversight offices with that have adopted the *Government Auditing Standards* more highly than information produced by offices that have adopted other types of research standards.

These hypotheses test the relationship between offices' utilization strategies and how their work is valued and used by key stakeholders in the legislative process. As noted by Knight (1996), institutional arrangements have practical consequences; substantial differences in how legislative oversight offices interact with their parent legislatures are thus expected to lead to corresponding differences in how their work is viewed and used. Hypothesis 16 predicts that offices with high utilization strategy scores will be both viewed more positively in their working relationships with legislative staff and be seen as having more impact in legislative oversight, budgeting, and policy formulation, enactment, and legitimatization than those offices with lower utilization strategy scores. Hypothesis 17 predicts that stakeholders will be neutral about the standards adopted by the offices and are not expected to view the credibility of work produced by offices differently based on whether they have adopted the *Government Auditing Standards*; offices that avoid interaction with their legislatures in order to worship at the altar of independence are expected to have done so for naught except perhaps the joy of being carried away on a wave of misplaced organizational isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Granovetter, 1973, 1985).

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHDOLOGY AND DATA SOURCES

This study used four primary data sources. These were (1) a nationwide survey of legislative oversight offices that was conducted by the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL); (2) a nationwide survey of senior legislative staff; (3) NCSL data on electoral and staffing changes within state legislatures over time; and (4) pre-existing indices of state political culture.

Survey of legislative oversight offices

To obtain data about legislative oversight offices and their activities, this study obtained data collected by the National Conference of State Legislatures from a survey of the oversight offices that was conducted from January through April 2004, with supplemental follow-up information collected in March through September 2006. The NCSL survey instrument is attached as Appendix A. This survey was sent to all legislative program evaluation offices that are members of the National Legislative Program Evaluation Society (NLPES), a staff section within NCSL. NLPES maintains a listing of key contacts for all legislative oversight offices that are considered to produce a material amount of oversight studies for their parent legislatures. The survey gained was largely conducted via e-mail using Perseus software, the same methodology used for the 2000 survey of NLPES member offices that was the basis for the 2002 Berry et al. study, with some survey data collected by telephone interviews with managers of offices that did not respond to the Perseus survey. The survey asked that a senior office manager complete the response to ensure that the survey reflected the perspectives of office management. Data gathered by the survey of oversight offices included their organizational characteristics, staffing levels, and legislative networking and marketing activities.

The 2004 survey received responses from 36 legislative oversight offices, while the 2006 follow-up effort produced responses from another six offices. In total, survey responses were received from all but one of the identified population of major legislative oversight units nationwide.¹²

Survey of legislative staff

To collect information about key legislative staffs' perceived value and use of these offices' products, a nationwide survey of these staff was conducted from August 2005 through January 2006. The survey instrument is attached as Appendix B. This survey was distributed in two ways. First, hard copies of the questionnaire form were distributed at professional meetings of leadership, appropriations, and research committee staff sponsored by the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL has separate staff section conferences for legislative staff that work in these areas). Second, a link to an on-line version of the questionnaire was emailed to key state contact persons for these NCSL staff sections, and these respondents completed the form on-line using Perseus software. As such, the survey design used a key informant rather than a random sampling strategy. This design was chosen in order to gain information from the relatively small group of legislative staff who are active users of policy research and are knowledgeable key stakeholders of the oversight offices. As discussed in Chapter 5, the survey respondents were generally senior staff with more than 10 years tenure with their legislatures.

The survey addressed the types of policy research received by these staff from various sources, the perceived credibility and usefulness of information received from these sources, and factors that affect how this information is used in the legislative process. The survey also asked the respondents to assess their

¹² Survey responses were received from 41 of the 42 offices identified by the Berry et al., study (2002). No response was received from the North Dakota Legislative Council, which does occasional oversight studies. However, a response was obtained from the Maine Office of Program Evaluation and Government Accountability which was established in 2005 after the Berry et al., study was completed. It should be noted that the California Legislative Analyst declined to complete the survey, but representative information about the office's activities was provided by other knowledgeable California legislative staff. While the 42 survey responses were received at different time periods, this difference is not material as the offices reporting in 2006 indicated that they had not substantially changed their networking and marketing practices in recent years.

familiarity with the work of their state's legislative oversight office and the methodological quality, timeliness, objectiveness, clarity, and usefulness of information produced by these offices. Specifically, the survey asked a series of questions relating to how the oversight offices' work was used by the legislature. Following the question design used by Hird (2005), the survey probed for instrumental, process/enlightenment, and legitimization use. For example, the survey asked whether the legislature generally implemented recommendations made by the offices, whether the offices brought fresh ideas and perspectives to the legislature, whether the legislature used the offices' work to gain a better understanding of policy issues, and whether legislators and staff discussed the offices' work in policy deliberations and cited the offices' work as a reason for their policy decisions. Finally, the survey asked the key stakeholder staff to rate how frequently they were contacted by the oversight offices, allowing comparison with how frequently the offices report such contacts.

Survey responses were received from a total of 320 legislative staff. While some of these staff represented states that did not have legislative oversight offices most (252) worked in states with oversight offices. As discussed in Chapter 5, many of the legislative stakeholders also indicated that they were not familiar enough with the work of the oversight offices to fully assess their work, a significant finding itself given the nature of the survey respondent population.

NCSL data on legislative elections and staffing

Two databases maintained by the NCSL were also used for this study. First, NCSL maintains a database showing the results of each legislative election cycle, which allowed for determination of whether legislative chambers had experienced a change in party leadership between 2000 and 2004; such changes in party control are predicted to function as a punctuated equilibrium point in which newly empowered coalitions may view existing legislative staff, including oversight offices, with suspicion (VanLandingham, 2005). Second, NCSL has periodically identified the total number of legislative staff employed by state legislatures, most recently doing so for 2003. Oversight offices in states with larger numbers of

legislative staff are expected to face increased competition for attention of key legislative stakeholders and respond with greater networking and marketing efforts.

Indices of state political culture

The study used five political culture indices reported by Hird (2005) to be statistically related to the size and activities of legislative research offices:

- *Party System Strength*—Morehouse and Jewell (2003), each state's party system strength. Following Hird (2005), these are coded as 1 = weak/moderate, 2 = strong.
- *Think Tanks*—Rich (2006), the number of think tanks in each state that focus on state politics.
- *Gross State Product*—U.S. Department of Commerce Bureau of Economic Analysis for 2005.
- *Policy Liberalism*—Erikson, Wright, and McIver (1993), public opinion measure of state policy liberalism.
- *Moralistic, Individualist, or Traditional Culture*—Gray (1999), which codes the political culture of states on a nominal scale as 1 = moralistic, 2 = individualist, and 3 = traditional.

Data analysis

To create aggregate measures of the legislative oversight offices' utilization strategies, data from the survey of legislative oversight offices were used to produce two sets of indexes—the first set measuring the offices' networking and marketing activities and the second set measuring key stakeholders' perceptions of the value and use of the offices' research products. A three step process was used to create the indices. First, survey questions were grouped based on their relationship to theoretical constructs. Thus, to create the marketing index, all survey questions were aggregated that addressed how frequently the oversight offices took various actions to distribute and promote their research products, such as by providing briefings and presentations to legislators and staff, distributing hard and electronic copies of their research reports, and holding media events to publicize these publications

to various user groups (see Appendix A to view the questions related to the oversight offices, and Appendix B to view the questions related to legislative staff perceptions of the offices and their work). Second, a principle component analysis was conducted to identify dimensions within these sets of survey questions that shared a high degree of variance. For example, the analysis identified several factor dimensions that were related to marketing research products, including activities to market research products to the legislature, efforts to provide supplemental research products designed for ready use by legislative stakeholders, activities to market research products to the media, and efforts to provide research products through alternative means such as PowerPoint, CD-Rom, and audiotape formats. Third, reliability analyses were conducted on these sets of questions to identify final sets that produced acceptable Chronbach's Alpha scores, which measure the internal reliability of summative scales by analyzing how well a set of items measures a single dimensional latent construct (Hair, et al., 2006).¹³

A factor complicating the analysis was that the survey questions used to construct the stakeholder networking and marketing indices (see below) were measured using different scales. Some of the questions used for these indices were measured on four-point Likert scales, such as questions that asked offices to indicate how frequently they contacted specified stakeholder groups; for these questions respondents answered using 4 = usually/always, 3 = often, 2 = sometimes, and 1 = never/rarely. For other questions, such as those asking how frequently the offices took specified actions to promote use of reports, respondents answered using three-point Likert scales in which 3 = usually, 2 = sometimes, and 1 = never. Finally, respondents were asked to answer other questions on a nominal scale, such as whether the offices published annual listings of cost savings and

¹³ The Chronbach's alpha scores for the indices were as follows: Stakeholder network = .781; Legislative marketing = .640; Supplement products = .614; Media marketing = .569; Alternative reports = .661; Overall marketing = .614; Working Relationship = .826; Office Value = .891; Process/Implementation Value = .844; Legitimization = .707). The generally agreed upon lower limit for Alpha is .7, although .6 is acceptable for exploratory research (Hair et al., 2006). The low alpha scores for Media marketing primarily reflects the inclusion of two factor dimensions related to media marketing – one relating to active media marketing (holding press conferences) and the second relating to less active media marketing (sending copies of reports via hard copy and email) which were combined to assess the underlying meta-construct of media marketing, and the fact that few offices conduct these activities.

recommendations, with 1 = yes and 0 = no. (One of the results of the reliability analyses was to drop many of the questions measured on nominal scales from the final question sets.) To adjust for these different measurement systems, these variables were converted to Z scores which enable subsequent parametric methods to be appropriately used to analyze the networking and marketing indices. This transformation was not needed for the stakeholder value indices (see below), as these indices were based on sets of survey questions that consistently asked respondents to reply using a five-point Likert scale in which 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neutral, 2 = disagree, and 1 = strongly disagree.

The indices were constructed as summative scales in which the responses to the survey questions were added together, as there was no a priori theoretical basis for giving greater weight to any of the survey questions included in the indices. To conduct sensitivity analyses of the networking and marketing indices, statistical analyses were performed using both raw and Z scores, and these analyses supported the same conclusions.

Office utilization indices

The survey of legislative oversight offices was used to create three indices, one of which included four subsidiary indices that assessed sub-elements of the overall construct of marketing.

Stakeholder network index score. This index assessed the frequency of routine contacts between the oversight offices and key legislative stakeholder groups. It summed responses to individual questions regarding how frequently the offices contacted legislative stakeholders regarding the research topics and issues to be studied, needed report timing, potential recommendations being considered, and to provide interim progress briefings. The index also summed responses to individual questions regarding the offices' frequency of contact with various legislative stakeholder groups (fiscal, policy committee, and leadership staff, fiscal and policy committee chairs, legislative leadership, and oversight committees), plus the percentage of studies that were conducted as a result of legislative requests.

Marketing index score. This index assessed the frequency of office efforts to design user-friendly research products and market these products to legislators, legislative staff, and the media. This index summed the values

of four components described below that examined separate categories of marketing activities.

Legislative marketing. This component index assessed the frequency of office activities to distribute oversight reports to legislative stakeholders. It summed responses to questions regarding the how often the offices marketed research products by sending email notifications, report copies, and executive summaries of reports to committees and legislators and how frequently the offices provided briefings to relevant legislative staff and legislators.

Supplemental products index score. This component index assessed the extent to which the offices provided supplemental research products intended to make it easier for legislative stakeholders to identify and implement oversight recommendations. It summed responses to questions on the size of office research products, and whether the offices published annual summaries of recommendations and potential cost savings. This index also summed the answers to questions regarding whether the offices identified the fiscal impacts and specific statutory sections affected by their recommendations, and how frequently the offices provided draft bill language and lobbied for adoption of recommendations.

Media marketing index score. This component index assessed the extent to which the offices marketed their reports to the media, and summed responses to questions regarding how frequently the offices sent copies of reports to the media, issued press releases, and held press conferences.

Alternative products index score. This component index summed responses to questions that asked whether the offices provided oversight findings in three specific formats—PowerPoint presentations, CD-ROMs, and audiotapes.

Overall utilization index score. This index was the sum of the Stakeholder Networking and Marketing indices.

To create aggregate measures of legislative staffs' perspective on the value and impact of work produced by the oversight offices, six additional indices were produced. The indices summed the responses provided by senior legislative staff to questions regarding the oversight offices:

Working Relationship. This index assessed legislative stakeholder satisfaction with the working relationship between the oversight office and the legislature. It summed responses to questions regarding whether the stakeholders received reports issued by the offices, could readily set the offices' research agenda, whether the office regularly met with the

stakeholders to discuss its work, whether the office did a good job making legislature aware of its work and whether it was easy to work with.

Office Value. This index assessed legislative stakeholder perceptions of the value of the offices and their work to the legislature. It summed responses to questions regarding whether relevant staff and legislators read and understood offices' reports, whether the offices' work helped the stakeholders do their job, whether the legislature held the office in high regard, whether respondents believed the offices' work was objective and timely, whether the office's work was considered to be more valuable than private think tank reports, whether the office did a good job meeting legislative information needs, whether the legislature needed more research like that produced by the office, and whether the offices' work helped keep agencies accountable and was useful for budgeting.

Process/Enlightenment Value. This index assessed legislative stakeholder perceptions of the how the offices' work was used in the legislative process. It summed responses to questions regarding whether the offices' work helped set legislative issue agenda, brought fresh ideas and perspectives to the legislature, and provided a critical review of policy proposals. The index also summed responses regarding whether the respondents viewed the offices as a good source of short-term research and analysis, whether the office helped the legislature understand policy issues, whether the offices did a good job evaluating programs and policies, and whether the offices were valuable for legislative oversight.

Implementation Value. This index assessed legislative stakeholder perceptions of whether recommendations made by the offices were likely to be implemented. It consisted of a single question on this issue.

Legitimatization Value. This index assessed legislative stakeholder perceptions of whether legislators were likely to cite offices' work as reason for policy decisions and whether legislators and staff cited the office's work in issue discussions. It summed responses to two questions on these issues.

Total Stakeholder Value. This index was the sum of the above stakeholder indices.

It should be noted that process and enlightenment use of the offices' work was combined into a single category of process/enlightenment use. Process use—which is defined as aiding in organizational learning—and enlightenment use—which is defined as aiding in changing long-term conceptualizations of policy—have essentially the same meaning in the legislative arena, where

legislators tend to have a short-term rather than a long-term perspective of policy issues (Kurtz et al., forthcoming).

The hypothesis were tested using a variety of statistical tests, including analysis of variance, two-sample T-tests, and ordinary least square regression.

CHAPTER 4

UTILIZATION STRATEGIES OF STATE LEGISLATIVE OVERSIGHT OFFICES

State legislative oversight offices vary widely in their institutional structure, size, functions, and research standards. The offices also vary substantially in how they interact with their parent legislatures, with most making only moderate application of the utilization strategies prescribed by literature. Differences in the offices' institutional structure and research norms are linked to their application of the utilization strategies.

Profile of oversight offices

The 42 legislative oversight offices share similarities but also exhibit important difference in their age, size, institutional relationship to their parent legislatures, research functions, and internal operations. The offices include large units with long histories of service and small units that were only recently created. The offices vary substantially in both the type and quantity of the research products they produce. While some offices conduct only program evaluations and policy analyses, others provide a wide range of research and legislative services to their legislatures. Some offices produce only a few evaluations and policy analyses per year, while others produce over 50 reports annually. Most offices set their research agenda based on legislative directives, but a few largely determine what issues to study based on internal deliberations. Most of the offices have adopted some form of formal research standards, with slightly over half (notably those offices that also conduct financial audits) adopting the *Government Auditing Standards* promulgated by the U.S. Government Accountability Office.

History

Most of the oversight offices have existed for many years. As shown in Figure 1, almost two-thirds of the offices have served their legislatures for more than 25 years, with the oldest (the California Legislative Analyst) existing for 65 years. Most of these offices (21) were created in the 1970s during the period of when many state legislatures substantially increased their professional staffing and research capacity. However, several offices are relatively young, with six existing for 10 years or less and one—the Maine Office of Program Evaluation and Government Accountability—becoming operational in 2005.

Figure 1. Most Legislative Oversight Offices Have Existed for More Than 25 Years

Institutional relationship to parent legislatures

The institutional relationship of the oversight offices to their parent legislatures varies substantially among the states. As shown in Figure 2, about half of the offices are assigned to the state's legislative auditor, which is usually responsible for conducting financial audits of state (and sometimes local) agencies in addition to conducting policy analyses and program evaluations; in these states, the oversight office is generally a separate division within the legislative auditor's unit. In about a third of the states, the oversight offices operate as independent legislative units. In the remaining states, the oversight offices typically function within a legislative committee (such as the appropriations or government oversight committee), and in one state is a hybrid

unit that is considered to be both a legislative and independent entity reporting to a citizen's commission.

Figure 2. Most Oversight Offices Are Assigned to Legislative Auditors or Independent Legislative Units

Most of the oversight offices (33) report to a joint legislative auditing or oversight committee, while three report directly to legislative leadership (the presiding officers). The remaining oversight offices have other reporting relationships such as to the entire legislative body, to a joint committee and legislative leadership, and/or a joint legislative and citizens' commission.

Staff size and trends

The oversight offices vary substantially in the number of staff they employ to conduct their evaluations and policy analyses. As shown in Figure 3, the offices can be categorized into four groups. Of the 40 offices that provided data on their staffing levels as of June 2006, a fifth (8) are small and operate with 10 or fewer staff, while half (20) are medium-sized with between 11 and 25 staff. About a quarter of the offices (9) are relatively large with between 26 and 50 staff, and the remaining three offices are large with over 50 staff. Overall, the oversight offices have a median of 19 employees.

Figure 3. Approximately Half of the Oversight Offices Have Between 11 and 25 Employees

Mirroring the tough budget years that most states have experienced in the early 2000s that required substantial spending cuts, many of the oversight offices reported staffing reductions between fiscal years 2001-01 and 2003-04, but they have since regained these positions (see Figure 4). The offices reported that they lost a net of 49 positions nationwide between fiscal years 2000-02 and 2003-04, representing about 5% of their former staffing levels. However, since that time total staffing for the offices has rebounded, and the offices have gained new positions that more than made up for the prior cuts. Overall, the offices report a net gain of 37 positions since 2000-01.

Figure 4. Staffing Levels of Oversight Offices Have Increased in Recent Years

Organizational threats

While the oversight offices have a mission of “speaking truth with power”, they also can encounter a “shoot the messenger” situation. Offices in five states reported recent threats to eliminate, substantially downsize, or merge their units with other entities.

In Florida the governor proposed to eliminate the budget of the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability for three straight budget years, apparently because the office had frequently criticized his administration’s implementation of various policy initiatives. In two of these years, legislation was also introduced that would have merged the office with the Florida Auditor General (T. Roth, personal interview, March 11, 2006). In Texas, the 2005 legislature considered a proposal to merge the Auditor General with the Texas Sunset Commission, reportedly due to opposition to the Auditor General’s performance evaluation activity. While this legislation did not pass, the Auditor General largely discontinued performance auditing thereafter and concentrated on financial auditing (K. Levine, personal interview, March 15, 2006). The South Carolina Legislative Audit Council reported a gubernatorial initiative to eliminate its funding during the recent budget downturn (J. Thesing, personal interview, March 15, 2006). The 2005 Georgia legislature considered, but did not pass, a proposal to move the Performance Audit Division of the Georgia Auditor General out of that unit and into the legislature to increase its responsiveness to legislative direction (J. Abbey, personal interview, March 16, 2006). Finally, the Ohio Legislative Office of Education Oversight was eliminated in 2005, reportedly after an incoming House Speaker objected to a report the office had issued that was critical of charter schools, an issue of personal interest to the new presiding officer (N. Zajano, personal interview, November 15, 2005).

It is interesting to note that four of these five offices were in states that had recently undergone major changes in party control. In Florida, Georgia, Texas, and South Carolina, the Republican Party gained control of the legislatures for

the first time since Reconstruction a few years before the organizational threats emerged.

Products

The oversight offices provide a variety of research products for their parent legislatures. As shown in Figure 5, almost all of the offices conduct policy analyses and program evaluations as a core product. About half of the offices (20 - those located in legislative auditor units) also conduct financial audits in addition to their policy analysis and program evaluation functions. In the remaining states, another entity—either a separate legislative auditor or an audit entity in the executive branch—conducts financial audits. About a third of the offices (14) conduct investigations as part of their activities, while about a quarter (11) have a role in developing, assessing, or validating their states' performance measurement systems. About a third of the offices serve other supportive roles for their legislatures; 11 offices develop fiscal notes that assess the potential fiscal impact of substantive and budget proposals, while three have a role in drafting legislation. Slightly less than a tenth (7) of the offices conduct sunset reviews that examine whether current state agencies and programs should be modified or eliminated. Finally, about a third of the offices (17) provide supplemental research services, which may include conducting best practice reviews of local government functions, auditing information technology systems, and/or providing short-term research services.

Oversight study initiation

The offices use a variety of methods to establish their research agendas. As shown in Figure 6, in most states the offices' research agenda is set by the legislature, either through provisions in statute or appropriations proviso or through directives from legislative leadership or the offices' governing committee. In slightly over half of the states, individual legislators and committees may also request the oversight offices to conduct studies. Slightly less than half of the offices self-initiate at least a portion of their research studies. Most of these states generate a relatively small proportion of their projects internally; however,

three reported generating over half of their workload through self-generated projects. Only a few (4) offices initiate projects upon the request of the governor or an executive agency, while one initiates projects based on directives from a citizens' commission.

Figure 5. Oversight Offices Provide a Variety of Research Services to Their Legislatures

Figure 6. Most Oversight Offices Initiate Research Projects as the Result of Legislative Directives

Report production

The offices vary in the number of reports that they publish each year, reflecting their differing staffing levels and responsibilities. As shown in Figure 7, slightly over a third of the offices (particularly those with relatively few staff) publish 10 or fewer reports per year, while a similar proportion publish between 11 and 25 reports annually. The remaining offices publish a high volume of reports per year (which often includes short-term as well as long-term research products), with the California Legislative Analyst reporting publishing 242 research products in the 2005.

Figure 7. Most Oversight Offices Publish Between 5 and 25 Reports Annually

The oversight offices face competing challenges when reporting their research results, seeking to provide complete information on their research findings while needing to quickly convey this information to busy legislative stakeholders. The offices have chosen different reporting strategies to do so. Figure 8 shows that over half of the offices publish relatively lengthy reports that average 25 pages or more, while slightly over a quarter publish reports that average between 11 and 25 pages in length. The remaining offices generally issue short reports that average 10 or fewer pages in length.

Figure 8. Most Oversight Offices Publish Relatively Lengthy Reports

Research Standards

Most oversight offices have adopted professional standards to guide their research activities. As shown in Figure 9, over half of the offices (24), including virtually all of the offices that are located within legislative auditing units that also conduct financial audits, have adopted the *Government Auditing Standards* promulgated by the U.S. Government Accountability Office. Other offices have adopted other standards, including the *Program Evaluation Standards* promulgated by the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation (adopted by two offices), the *Guiding Principles* promulgated by the American Evaluation Association (followed by one office), or other standards such as ‘good research practices’ (six offices). However, about a quarter of the offices (11) have not adopted any formal research standards.

Figure 9. Most Oversight Offices Have Adopted Formal Research Standards

Utilization activities of oversight offices

The offices make varying application of the utilization strategies prescribed by literature. This study examined the offices' activities in five areas: developing user-friendly research reports; using alternative reporting strategies; marketing reports to the media; marketing research products to key stakeholders; and networking with key legislative stakeholders.

User-friendly research products

As shown in Figure 10, the offices generally do not take the steps recommended by utilization literature to provide research findings in formats designed for ready use by busy legislative stakeholders. Only 8 offices conduct more than 20% of their studies in relatively short time periods (under 2 months) to meet short-term legislative research needs, while nine offices do so for 10 to 20% of their studies and 24 either conduct no such rapid studies or do so less than 10% of the time. Only 12 offices regularly conduct follow-up studies to bring issues back before their legislatures and to determine if previously identified

issues have been resolved. Less than a quarter of the offices publish an annual report listing previous recommendations that have not yet been implemented, and only six regularly provide quantified estimates of the fiscal impact of potential cost savings actions. Only four offices regularly provide their findings in short reports (10 pages or less), while most of the offices publish reports that are generally over 25 pages in length.

Figure 10. Relatively Few Oversight Offices Provide Research Products That Literature Indicates Promotes Legislative Use

Alternative reporting techniques

As shown in Figure 11, the oversight offices generally transmit their research products to legislative stakeholders by sending them copies of their reports and/or emailing executive summaries of the findings. About a third of the offices routinely provide copies of PowerPoint presentations of their findings, often by posting them to office websites. Few offices provide hard copies of executive summaries to all legislative stakeholders or provide report summaries via CD-ROMs or audiotapes. None of the offices currently provide videotapes of report findings.

Figure 11. Oversight Offices Most Frequently Communicate With Stakeholders Via Hard Copies of Reports and Emailed Report Summaries

Marketing to the media

As shown in Figure 12, most offices make limited efforts to communicate their findings to the media. About half of the offices routinely send copies of their reports to the media, and about a third routinely send email notifications to the media to announce the publication of new reports. Only a few issue press releases or contact media representatives by phone or fax to notify reporters of report releases, and very few hold press conferences.

Figure 12. Oversight Offices Generally Make Limited Efforts to Market Reports to the Media

Marketing to legislative stakeholders

As shown in Figure 13, most offices make limited use of the prescribed strategies for marketing their research products to legislative stakeholders. The offices are most likely to send copies and summaries of their reports to relevant legislative committees, provide recommendations for legislative action, and identify specific sections of statutes that would need to be amended to implement these recommendations. The offices are less likely to provide briefings to legislators and legislative staff, provide presentations to relevant committees, provide copies of reports and summaries to all legislators, draft bill language to implement recommendations, or provide fiscal impact estimates. The offices are least likely to actively lobby legislators to implement recommendations, as only two offices report sometimes taking this step.

Stakeholder networking

Utilization literature suggests that oversight offices should establish close networks with key legislative stakeholders. They can do so in two ways—by contacting the stakeholders to receive input during their individual research studies, and by having regular ongoing contacts with these individuals.

As shown in Figure 14, the offices vary in how frequently they contact legislative stakeholders during research studies. The offices reported that they are mostly likely to contact legislative stakeholders when determining what issues to examine within research studies, followed by contacts involving when the findings were needed for legislative consideration. The offices generally reported little contact with stakeholders to discuss research designs and potential recommendations or to provide interim briefings.

Figure 13. Oversight Offices Are Most Likely to Send Reports to Committees and Provide Recommendations for Legislative Action

Figure 14. Oversight Offices Make the Most Frequent Contact with Legislative Stakeholders Regarding Identifying Research Issues

The offices also reported varying frequencies of contact with different legislative stakeholder groups. As shown in Table 16, the offices have the most frequent contact with staff of legislative fiscal committees and the oversight committees to which they report. Slightly less than half of the offices have frequent contact with policy committee and leadership staff. The offices generally have limited contact with chairs of fiscal and policy committees and legislative leadership (e.g., the presiding officers of legislative chambers).

Figure 15. Oversight Offices Have the Most Frequent Contact with Fiscal Staff and Oversight Committees

Overall application of utilization strategies

As shown in Table 2, the offices range widely in their application of the utilization strategies suggested by literature, with the widest proportional difference in the use of legislative stakeholder network strategies. One of the most striking findings of the survey was that most offices have relatively low utilization scores. No office uses all of the strategies to promote use; the highest score attained by any single office was 83 and the average was 64.95 of the possible 101 points. The average evaluation office has a networking index score of 27.81 (out of a possible 43), and a marketing index score of 37.14 (out of a possible 58).

Table 2
Oversight Offices Varied Substantially in Utilization Strategy Scores

Strategy Category	Average Score	Lowest Score	Highest Score
Networking	27.81	15	41
Marketing	37.14	27	49
Overall	64/95	47	83

(N = 42) Maximum possible index scores: Network - 43; Marketing - 58; Overall Utilization - 101.

As shown in Table 3, about half (20) offices make relatively high use (attaining two-thirds or more of the possible index points) of the stakeholder networking strategies, while slightly over a third (15, or 36%) make relatively high use of the marketing strategies, and 18 offices (42%) make relatively high use of the overall utilization strategies. In contrast, six offices make relatively low use (under half of the possible index points) of stakeholder networking strategies, one makes relatively low use of the product design/marketing strategies, and three make relatively low use of the overall utilization strategies.

Table 3
Most Oversight Offices Have Moderate Overall utilization Strategy Scores

Utilization Scores (Percent of Possible)	Number of Offices		
	Networking	Marketing	Overall
High (67% or higher)	20	15	18
Moderate (50 to 66%)	17	26	21
Low (Less than 50%)	6	1	3

(N = 42)

Tests of hypotheses

These data allow testing of the first three hypotheses regarding the oversight offices' utilization strategies—relating to their institutional design, major activities, and research standards.

Effect of institutional design

As predicted by Hypothesis 1, the institutional design of legislative oversight offices was found to be highly related to their utilization strategies. As shown in Table 4, the oversight offices located in traditional financial audit organizations (Type 1 units as categorized by Berry et al., 2002) have markedly lower stakeholder network, marketing, and overall utilization scores than the legislative (Type 2) offices located in legislative committees or units. (Index scores are shown as Z scores, and the mirrored values are the result of the equal n size in this analysis.) The difference in index scores between the two types of offices is statistically significant for both stakeholder networking and overall utilization index scores. This empirically supports the concept that oversight offices' normative emphasis on independence is negatively associated with their actions to work with key stakeholders. The marketing efforts of the oversight offices, however, do not appear to vary based on their institutional design.¹⁴

¹⁴ The subcomponents of the marketing index (Legislative marketing, media marketing, alternative products, and supplemental products) also showed no relationship.

Table 4
Oversight Offices Located in Audit Organizations Have Significantly Lower Utilization Strategy Scores Than Offices Located in Legislative Units

Office Type	Mean Z	Standard Error	T	Significance
Total Utilization Index				
Auditor (n = 21)	-4.0163	2.59750		
Legislative (n = 21)	4.0163	246607	-.2.243	.031
Networking Index				
Auditor (n = 21)	-3.1251	1.41534		
Legislative (n = 21)	3.1251	1.41879	-3.119	.003
Marketing Index				
Auditor (n = 21)	-.8911	1.65045		
Legislative (n = 21)	.8911	1.60889	-.773	.444

Effect of major office activities

As shown in Table 5, while the offices that have more than half of their staffing dedicated to financial auditing make lower use of the utilization strategies than those offices that are focused on program evaluation and policy analyses, as predicted by Hypothesis 2, this difference is not statistically significant.¹⁵ This is likely due in part to the fact that this aggregation of offices includes both Type 1 offices that concentrate their efforts on evaluations and policy analysis and Type 2 offices although the two types of offices have markedly different utilization patterns, as shown above.

Effect of research norms

As predicted by Hypothesis 3, the research norms followed by the oversight offices are significantly associated with their utilization strategies. As shown in Table 6, those offices that have adopted the *Government Auditing Standards* have markedly lower utilization scores than the offices that have not adopted these standards and the difference in both stakeholder network and overall utilization index scores are both statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level. Thus, the oversight offices' institutional norms (namely a focus on independence)

¹⁵ The subcomponents of the marketing index (Legislative marketing, media marketing, alternative products, and supplemental products) also showed no relationship.

are strongly associated with their behavior in working with legislative stakeholders and actively marketing their evaluations reports.

Table 5
No Relationship Found Between Utilization Strategy Scores of Offices Based on Percentage of Staffing Allocated to Program Evaluations and Policy Analyses

Office Type	Mean Z	Standard Error	T	Significance
Total Utilization Index				
Financial (n = 12)	-2.3518	2.70784		
Evaluation (n = 24)	1.4350	2.30383	-1.086	.324
Networking Index				
Financial (n = 12)	-1.7226	1.57130		
Evaluation (n = 24)	.7966	1.42850	-1.090	.283
Marketing Index				
Financial (n = 12)	-.3292	1.79839		
Evaluation (n = 24)	.6384	1.35889	-.550	.586

Table 6
Offices that Have Adopted the Government Auditing Standards Have Lower Utilization Strategy Scores

Standards Followed	Mean Z	Standard Error	T	Significance
Total Utilization Index				
Government Auditing (n = 22)	-4.1507	2.09659		
Other (n = 20)	4.5657	2.91940	-2.458	.018
Networking Index				
Government Auditing (n = 22)	-2.9956	1.31318		
Other (n = 20)	3.3251	1.52671	-3.140	.003
Marketing Index				
Government Auditing (n = 22)	-1.1551	1.30557		
Other (n = 20)	1.2706	1.93001	-.1058	.296

Resource outcomes

Given this difference in the behavior of oversight offices that are located in different types of organizations and follow different types of research standards, an obvious question is “do these differences affect the level of resources the

offices are granted by their parent legislatures?” This question is guided by organizational theory which holds that such connections between organizations and their environment are critical in linking organizations to entities that can provide resources, credibility, and legitimacy (Galaskiewicz and Bielefeld, 1998). Organizations that have characteristics that best fit their environment (by actively forming networks with key legislative stakeholders and marketing their work in the highly political and network-centric legislative environment) are expected to have competitive advantages over those entities that have characteristics that are not in harmony with these environmental pressures (Hannan and Freeman, 1977, 1989; Amburgey and Rao, 1996); offices are expected to have a positive fit with their environment thrive while those that do not fit may pay a resource price or face organizational failure. Accordingly, this study examined the relationships between oversight offices’ utilization strategies and their resource levels (staffing over time) and experience of organizational threats in recent years. The study also examined the relationship between utilization strategies and changes in party control of legislatures, which often create a more challenging resource environment for legislative staff organizations (VanLandingham, 2005). Finally, the study examined the relationship between the utilization strategies and the offices’ overall staffing levels to determine if offices with more proactive utilization efforts had larger staffing levels, which may indicate their success in resource competition and that large staffing is needed to support strong networking and marketing efforts.

Staffing change over time. While the oversight offices that experienced net staffing losses between 2000 and 2006 period had slightly lower networking and total utilization index scores than those that did not experience staff losses, as predicted by Hypothesis 4, this difference is not statistically significant. (A separate OLS regression model showed no relationship between net staffing changes and utilization scores.) A likely explanation for this outcome is that the difficult budget years experienced by most states during this time period outweighed any disadvantage that low utilization score offices had compared to higher utilization score units in relative resource competition.

Table 7
No Relationship Found Between Office Utilization Scores and
Staffing Levels Over the 2000-2006 Period

Staffing Change Over 2000-2006 Period	Mean Z	Standard Error	T	Significance
Total Utilization Index				
Staffing loss (n=9)	-2.51150	4.24329		
No Loss or Gain (n=31)	-.7752	1.96123	-.406	.687
Networking Index				
Staffing loss (n=9)	-2.3031	2.61006		
No Loss or Gain (n=31)	-.1549	1.06550	-.858	.397
Marketing Index				
Staffing loss (n=9)	-.2119	2.51362		
No Loss or Gain (n=31)	-.6203	1.22970	..154	.878

Organizational threats. As shown in Table 8, no relationship was found between the oversight offices' utilization scores and whether they have faced recent threats to eliminate, downsize, or merge their operations with other units. Oversight offices in five states (Florida, Georgia, Ohio, South Carolina, and Texas) reported such threats. The table shows that these offices have substantially higher marketing and total stakeholder index scores than offices that have not faced such threats, the opposite relationship laid out in Hypothesis 5, which predicted that office with low scores would face greater threats because they provided relatively little value to their legislatures. However, these differences in utilization scores were not statistically significant.

There are two potential explanations for this outcome. First, as the offices generally reported their utilization activities after these threats had occurred (the threats occurred between 2003 and 2005, while the offices reported their activities in 2004 and 2006), the offices may have reacted to the threats by increasing their networking and marketing efforts; such behavior is predicted by resource contingency theory (Pfeffer and Salencki, 1978) which predicts that organizations will take steps to increase their success in obtaining resources from their environments. Second, it could be argued that oversight offices may face increased risk of organizational threats if they are highly engaged with their

legislature as they could be more effective in providing oversight and policy information; forces that are negatively affected by these offices could react to their greater effectiveness by seeking to eliminate them rather than simply attempting to refute their findings. For example, the Florida Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability has relatively high networking and total utilization index scores yet faced a major threat to its existence, reportedly because the Governor sought to eliminate a source of criticism of his administration.

Table 8
No Relationship Found Between Organizational Threats and
Utilization Scores of Oversight Offices

Recent Threat	Mean Z	Standard Error	T	Significance
Total Utilization Index				
No (n = 35)	-.6242	1.95334		
Yes (n = 5)	1.8850	7.26793	-.664	.668
Networking Index				
No (n = 35))	-.0434	1.03786		
Yes (n = 5)	-1.8399	4.52859	.563	.577
Marketing Index				
No (n = 35)	-.5809	1.29044		
Yes (n = 5)	3.7249	3.16005	-1.330	.242

Changes in party control. As shown in Table 9, there was no material difference in resource outcomes between oversight offices in states that have experienced a change in party control of at least one legislative chamber since 2000 compared to those that have not experienced such changes in party control. Oversight offices that had experienced changes in party control gained an average of 1.24 positions, slightly more than the average of .8667 positions gained by offices serving legislatures that had not experienced changes in party control. Hypothesis 6 had predicted that changes in party control would pose a more challenging resource environment for offices because newly empowered policy coalitions often view existing staff resources with suspicion

(VanLandingham, 2005), but this hypothesis was not supported by these results. The positive resource outcomes of offices in states that have experienced changes in party control could indicate that these offices have been relatively successful in gaining the trust of the new policy coalitions. Also, the small magnitude of the difference in oversight office staffing levels between party-change and non party-change states may have been masked by the effects of the major budget shortfalls that many states experienced during this period; offices in non party-change states may have experienced staffing reductions due to fiscal pressures irrespective of their more favorable political environment. Nonetheless, changes in party control does appear to increase to risk of organizational threats to the offices, as four of the five offices that had experienced such threats (Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, and Texas) experienced changes in party control in which the Republican Party gained control of the state legislature for the first time since Reconstruction. Thus, the magnitude of a change in party control (length of time since the newly empowered party was last in power) may tend to aggravate the tendency of new policy coalitions to view existing staff and institutions with suspicion.

Table 9
No Relationship Found Between Changes in Party Control of Legislatures and Changes in Oversight Office Staffing Over the 2000-06 Period

Party Change	Staffing Change	Standard Error	T	Significance
Total Utilization Index				
No (n = 15)	.8667	.94045		
Yes (n = 25)	1.2400	.84317	-.285	.777

Staffing size. The size of the oversight offices was not found to be significantly related to their utilization strategies. As shown by Table 10, an OLS regression model found no relationship between the number of staff allocated to program evaluations and policy analyses by oversight offices and their utilization strategy scores. Hypothesis 7 had predicted that offices with a greater number of staff would have higher utilization strategy scores than offices with lower numbers of staff as greater staffing resources would provide greater

organizational capacity to engage in networking and marketing activities. However, the regression model explained virtually no variation and was not statistically significant.

A partial explanation for this outcome is that the mean number of staff allocated to performance evaluations and policy analysis in Type 1 auditing offices tends to be larger than the staffing level of Type 2 legislative offices. Type 1 offices had an average of 28.62 staff allocated to these functions in 2006, compared to 18.00 staff in Type 2 offices. However, these data must be viewed with some caution, as one of the largest Type 1 offices (the California Bureau of State Audits) reported all of its staffing as allocated to program evaluations and policy analyses, although the office also conducts financial and operational audits. Further, the Michigan State Auditor reported an estimated allocation of its total staffing to performance versus financial audits which appeared to be quite high compared to its predominate financial auditing orientation.

Table 10
No Relationship Found Between Utilization Scores and Total Staff Allocated to Program Evaluation and Policy Analysis Functions of Oversight Offices

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients		t	Significance
	B	Standard Error		
Constant	23.744	3.598	6.2599	.000
Marketing	.528	.566	.933	.357
Networking	-.172	.593	-.290	.773
Model		22.626	F=.473	.649
Model R ₂ = .023 ; Adj R ₂ = -.030 n = 39				
Dependent variable = number of staff allocated to performance evaluations and policy analyses in 2003-04.				

Environment factors generally not related to utilization efforts

Generally, the utilization activities of the oversight offices were not found to be highly related to their organizational environment, as only one of the eight hypotheses relating to these environmental variables was supported. Hird (2005) had found that the size of legislative nonpartisan research offices, and in some cases the types of research services they provided, was related to factors in their environment, and concluded that certain types of political environments were

more conducive to supporting oversight and policy research activities within legislatures.¹⁶ This study assessed whether these environmental factors were also related to oversight offices' efforts to build stakeholder networks and market their work. The study accordingly examined the relationship between the offices' utilization strategy index scores and eight environmental factors—the number of professional staff employed by their parent legislatures, the number of private think tanks operating within their states that specialized in state policy studies, the degree of state policy liberalism, state wealth as measured by gross state product, state party strength, state political culture (moralistic, traditionalist, or individualist), whether their legislatures are subject to term limits, and the nature of their parent legislatures (professional, citizen, or hybrid).

As shown in Table 11, OLS regression models were run to examine the relationship between the oversight offices' utilization strategy scores and four institutional environmental factors that are available as interval-level variables—the total number of legislative staff in the offices' parent legislatures who can serve as competing sources of policy information, the number of private think tanks in their state that can serve as competing sources of policy information, state policy liberalism index scores, and overall state wealth as measured by gross state product.

The regression models for these relationships were not statistically significant, nor were Beta values for any of the independent variables. Accordingly, the marketing and networking activities of the oversight offices cannot be explained by factors that can be seen as creating more problematic or receptive environments for their work. Hypotheses 8 and 9 had predicted that oversight offices that faced greater competition from other sources of policy advice to legislators from greater numbers of other legislative staff (Hypothesis 8) or larger numbers of private think tanks that specialized in state-level policy

¹⁶ To further test the application of Hird's findings to the oversight offices, a regression model was run to assess the relationship between the offices' staffing size and the environmental variables. This model found that office staffing was positively related to the number of professional staff in the state legislature (Beta = .052, standard error = .023, $p=.056$, and the overall model was marginally statistically significant ($p=.0778$) with an adjusted R^2 of .46. However the other environmental variables cited by Hird—state policy liberalism score, number of state policy think tanks and gross state product—were not found to be statistically significant.

analysis (Hypothesis 9) would react by being more proactive in their networking and marketing activities. Hypothesis 10 and 11 had predicted that the offices would have higher utilization strategy scores if they faced more supportive environments for policy innovation. However, oversight offices serving legislatures in states with more liberal policy environments were not found to have higher utilization strategy scores (Hypothesis 10), nor were offices serving legislature in wealthier states (Hypothesis 11).

Party strength. As shown in Table 12, state party strength was found to be related to oversight office utilization strategies, as oversight offices in states with strong party systems have markedly higher stakeholder networking scores than offices with weaker party control of government. (The offices' marketing and total utilization strategy scores are also higher in strong party states, but these differences are not statistically significant.) This is a highly interesting finding that is inconsistent with Hird's (2005) finding that states with strong party systems tended to have smaller nonpartisan research offices that provided more descriptive research. However, as posited by Hypothesis 12, which this finding supports, oversight offices in such states appear to react to this more challenging political environment by increasing their efforts to build strong networks with key legislative stakeholders to compensate for lower overall political support for oversight and external input into policy debates that are controlled by strong political parties.

State political culture. No relationship was found between states' political culture, as categorized by Gray (1999), and the utilization activities of the oversight offices. As shown in Table 13 while the overall utilization index, networking index, and marketing index z scores for offices in states with an individualist political culture are lower those of offices serving legislatures in states with moralistic or traditionalist political cultures, the difference was not statistically significant, due in part to a relative wide standard error for each variable. Thus hypothesis 13, which had predicted that oversight offices serving states with a moralistic political culture would have higher utilization strategy scores than offices serving legislatures in states with a non-moralistic political

culture, was not supported. Hird (2005) had found such a relationship between moralistic state political cultures and the staffing size of nonpartisan research offices.

Table 11
No Relationship Found Between Oversight Office Utilization Strategy Scores and Legislative Staffing, Private Think Tanks, State Policy Liberalism, or State Wealth

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients		t	Significance
	B	Standard Error		
Total Utilization Index				
Constant	-.533	3.271	-.163	.871
Legislative Staffing	-.004	.006	-.703	.487
Think Tanks	.451	.815	.554	.583
Policy Liberalism	-1.065	2.762	-.386	.702
State Wealth	1.065	2.762	.345	.612
Model		12.64897	F=.613	.732
Model R ² =.066; Adj R ² = -.041 n=40				
Marketing Index				
Constant	-1.071	1.973	-.543	.591
Legislative Staffing	-.002	.003	-.615	.543
Think Tanks	.157	.491	.320	.751
Policy Liberalism	-.083	1.666	-.050	.960
State Wealth	7.362	.000	.633	.531
Model		7.63032	F=.951	.447
Model R ² =.098; R ² = -.005 n=40				
Networking Index				
Constant	.538	1.935	.278	.783
Legislative Staffing	-.002	.003	-.561	.578
Think Tanks	.294	.482	.609	.546
Policy Liberalism	-.982	1.634	-.601	.552
State Wealth	-7.061	.000	-.062	.951
Model		7.48459	F=.331	.855
Model R ² =.036 ; Adj R ² = -.074 n=40				

Note: Policy liberalism score not available for Alaska or Hawaii in Erikson, Wright, and McIver (1993).

Table 12
Oversight Offices in States with Strong Party Systems Had Higher Stakeholder Networking Scores than Offices in States with Weak/Moderate Party Systems

Party Strength	Mean Z	Standard Error	T	Significance
Total Utilization Index				
Strong (n = 13)	4.2678	3.06968		
Not Strong (n = 29)	-1.9131	2.28848	-1.548	.129
Networking Index				
Strong (n = 13)	3.2695	2.02883		
Not Strong (n = 29)	-1.4656	1.24251	-2.061	.046
Marketing Index				
Strong (n = 13)	.9982	2.17736		
Not Strong (n =29)	-.4475	1.36199	-.578	.556

Table 13
No Relationship Was Found Between Political Culture and Utilization Scores

Political Culture	Mean Z	Standard Error	T	Significance
Total Utilization Index				
Moralistic (n=14)	4.4833	3.58124		
Individualist (n=12)	4.9145	2.89564	2.031	.145
Traditionalist (n=16)	-.2371	3.23639		
Networking Index				
Moralistic (n=14)	1.7278	1.59219		
Individualist (n=12)	-2.2367	1.85751	1.000	.377
Traditionalist (n=16)	-.1657	2.11925		
Marketing Index				
Moralistic (n=14)	2.7555	2.31297		
Individualist (n=12)	-2.6778	1.384598	1.837	.173
Traditionalist (n=16)	-.4027	1.64086		

N=42

Term limits. As shown in Table 14 no relationship was found between the offices' utilization scores and whether their legislatures are operating under term limits. In fact, there was very little difference between the z scores for the offices serving term limited and term-limited legislatures. This outcome did not support Hypothesis 14, which had predicted that offices serving term limited legislatures would react to this more challenging environment by increasing their

efforts to form strong networks with key stakeholders and aggressively market their products.

Table 14
Oversight Offices in States with Legislative Term Limits Do Not Have Higher Utilization Scores Than Offices in States Without Term Limits

Term Limits	Mean Z	Standard Error	T	Significance
Total Utilization Index				
Yes (n=15)	-.6832	3.26427		
No (n=27)	.3795	2.33178	-.268	.790
Networking Index				
Yes (n=15)	-.7340	1.65369		
No (n=27)	.4078	1.46669	-.491	.626
Marketing Index				
Yes (n=15)	.0508	2.33024		
No (n=27)	-.0282	1.26550	-.033	.974

(N=42)

Legislative type. As shown in Table 1, while offices that reported to professional legislatures had markedly higher total utilization and marketing index scores than offices that reported to hybrid and citizen legislatures, this difference was not statistically significant. Hypothesis 15, which predicted such a relationship, thus was not supported.

Table 15
No Relationship Was Found Between Type of Legislature and Utilization Activities

Type of Legislature	Mean Z	Standard Error	T	Significance
Total Utilization Index				
Professional (n=7)	2.0985	5.08787		
Hybrid (n=23)	.4383	2.52902	.282	.756
Citizen (n=12)	-2.0642	3.54142		
Stakeholder Index				
Professional (n=7)	-1.2119	1.93832		
Hybrid (n=23)	.8832	1.51851	.378	.688
Citizen (n=12)	-.9859	2.25574		
Marketing Index				
Professional (n=7)	3.3104	3.97317		
Hybrid (n=23)	-.4449	1.34360	.856	.433
Citizen (n=12)	-1.0783	2.11939		

Conclusion

While legislative oversight offices face substantial challenges in promoting use of their work by policymakers, they have often taken only cautious steps to overcome these challenges by adopting the assertive networking and marketing strategies suggested by evaluation utilization theory. The primary factors that explain the substantial variations among the offices in their efforts to reach out to legislative stakeholders and market their work appear to be the institutional design and internal research norms of the offices. Offices that are located in traditional financial auditing units and/or have adopted the *Government Auditing Standards* are apparently often unwilling or unable to form close networks with legislative stakeholders and to actively promote their work; apparently believing that such activities could pose a threat to their organizational independence. No other tested environmental factor was statistically significant when tested, with the exception of party strength; offices working for legislatures in strong-party strength states do take somewhat greater steps to establish networks with legislative staff stakeholders, potentially to help manage the more challenging policy environment they face.

Little relationship was found between the offices' utilization activities and their staffing levels. While oversight offices with higher utilization scores were found to have experienced slightly more positive resource outcomes (slightly higher mean staffing gains) over the 2000-2006 period compared to offices with lower scores, this difference was not statistically significant. This outcome could be partly explained by the budget crises experienced by many states during this period that required across-the-board budget reductions rather than surgical pruning of organizations that were not proving their worth to their parent legislatures.

In summary, although oversight offices have the mission to serve their parent state legislatures and seek to have their work used within the legislative process, they often have not fully heeded the call to deliver "utilization-focused evaluations" (Patton, 1997) that strategically engage stakeholders and are

designed and marketed to promote use by policymakers. This may help explain the general perception that oversight studies have relatively little impact in the legislative process. The next chapter explores the relationship between the offices' networking and marketing behaviors and key legislative stakeholders' satisfaction and use of research work produced by the oversight offices.

CHAPTER 5

LEGISLATIVE STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES ON OVERSIGHT OFFICES

As discussed in Chapter 4, state legislative oversight offices vary substantially in how they interact with their parent legislatures. Some offices are highly engaged, seeking to form close networks with key legislative stakeholders and assertively marketing their research products. In contrast, other offices are highly independent and make limited efforts to contact key legislative stakeholder groups or market their work to these persons. These differences in behavior cannot be explained by the offices' differing institutional environments—this study found little relationship between the offices' utilization strategy index scores and the factors that literature suggests could be drivers of their behavior, such as their states' political culture, the relative size of their legislatures' total staffing, competition from other in-state sources of policy research, changes in party control of legislative chambers, or whether they serve full-time or part-time or hybrid legislatures. Instead, the differences can largely be explained by factors internal to the offices themselves—whether they are located within independent financial auditing organizations or entities located closer to the legislative process, and whether their adopted formal research standards stress organizational independence versus active engagement with user groups.

While these findings are important, the larger question is “what practical impact do these differences in office behavior have on how the oversight offices' work is viewed and used in the legislative process?” This chapter addresses this question by examining how key legislative stakeholders assess the oversight offices and the impact of their work, and whether these perceptions vary based on the offices' networking and marketing activities.

To examine these issues, this study conducted a survey of legislative staff who are key stakeholders of the oversight offices—senior staff who work in leadership, appropriations, and research positions within state legislatures. The

survey was conducted between August 2005 and January 2006, and was co-sponsored by the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL). The survey addressed factors that influence the use of policy research and the respondent's familiarity with and perceptions of the quality and usefulness of research produced by different sources, including legislative oversight offices.

Profile of survey respondents

Survey responses were received from 320 legislative staff. As shown in Figure 16, these staff represented 46 states and Puerto Rico; five respondents did not indicate their state. The respondents provided information relevant to 38 of the 42 state legislative oversight offices—no responses were received from the states of New Hampshire, South Carolina, or Missouri, which each have an oversight office; while ten responses were received from Texas, all identified the Texas Sunset Commission as the oversight office they were assessing and none of the respondents assessed the Texas State Auditor. In total, 252 of the respondents were from states that had legislative oversight offices. The remaining 68 respondents worked for legislatures in states that do not have such offices (New York, New Jersey, Oklahoma, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont; worked for a legislature in a national territory rather than a state (Puerto Rico), or did not identify their home state.

Job position of survey respondents

As shown in Figure 17, about half of the respondents worked in committee or research positions, while about a fifth each worked in leadership or appropriations positions. The remaining respondents (slightly over 10%) worked in other types of legislative positions, including staff to partisan offices, individual members, legislative legal services units, or legislative administration. While these respondents were not part of the survey's target population, they can reasonably be considered to be part of the oversight offices' key stakeholder group and were included in this analysis. Partisan offices are a prime source of policy and bill development in legislatures (Weberg and Kurtz, forthcoming), and

aides to individual legislators must be aware of policy developments to help prepare their members to debate and vote on bills. While legislative legal and administrative staff may not play a role in policy development per se, they are often astute observers of all actors within the legislative arena, including oversight offices.

Figure 16. Survey Respondents Represented Legislatures in 46 States

Figure 17. Most Survey Respondents Represented Research Committee, Leadership, and Appropriations Staff

Tenure of survey respondents

As shown in Figure 18, the survey respondents were generally senior-level staff. Over half had worked with their legislatures for more than 10 years, while another fifth had between 5 and 10 years of experience. A quarter of the respondents had worked with their legislatures for between 1 and 5 years. Only 3% of the respondents had less than a year of experience with their legislature.

Figure 18. Most Respondents Had More Than 10 Years Legislative Experience

The survey respondents can thus reasonably be considered to represent knowledgeable key stakeholders of the legislative oversight offices. The respondents are highly experienced persons in key legislative policy and budget positions that routinely receive policy information from a variety of sources, and they can be expected to be knowledgeable about how such information is viewed and used within the legislative process.

Factors important to legislative use of policy research studies

To assess how the oversight offices' work is used by the key stakeholders, it is helpful to know what factors these persons consider to be important to such legislative use. As shown in Figure 19, the survey respondents rated four factors as particularly key to legislative use of policy research studies—the clarity of findings and recommendations; the studies' timeliness; their relevance to the legislature's information needs; and the reputation of the office publishing the reports—each of these factors was cited as “very important” by over 70% of the respondents. The relevance of the studies to legislative staff and the studies' methodological quality were also cited as highly important but to a lesser extent—these factors were rated as “very important” by about half of the respondents. The ability of state legislatures to provide direct input to the researchers doing the studies; the degree of conflict surrounding the studies' topic, findings, and recommendations; and the presence of advocates and detractors of the studies were viewed as somewhat important but not as critical by the respondents.

Credibility of information sources

Survey respondents were also asked to rate the credibility of a wide range of entities that provide information to their legislatures. As shown in Figure 20, the respondents indicated that NCSL was the single most credible source of policy information, with this organization viewed as “very credible” by 70% of the survey respondents and at least somewhat credible by 92% of all respondents. The next most highly rated information sources were federal agencies, internal legislative studies by fiscal, substantive, and research committees, other national organizations such as the Council of State Governments, and state auditors and legislative oversight offices. It should be noted that a relatively high percentage of respondents—29%—could not rate the credibility of the oversight offices, as discussed in more detail below. Executive branch agencies and governors' offices were generally viewed as at least somewhat credible. However, private

think tanks, industry groups, partisan offices, and the media were generally viewed to be substantially less credible information sources.

Usefulness information sources

The survey respondents were also asked to rate how useful the various organizations were to their legislatures. NCSL was viewed as the most useful information source by the survey respondents—86% of survey respondents indicated that NCSL's information was either “highly useful” (51%) or “somewhat useful” (35%). Over half of respondents also viewed information by federal agencies, other national organizations, legislative committees, state auditors, oversight offices, executive branch agencies, the governor's office, the state auditor, and industry groups as either highly or somewhat useful. Less than half of respondents viewed information provided by partisan offices, private think tanks, and the media as highly or somewhat useful to their work.

Familiarity with oversight offices

The survey respondents were asked to rate how familiar they were with their state's oversight offices. As shown in Figure 22, many of the respondents—despite being logical key users of offices' work—indicated that they were not very familiar with their state's oversight offices. Over a fifth of the respondents, in fact, did not know whether or not their state legislature had an oversight office, and many respondents who indicated that their state had or did not have such an office were in error. While a quarter of the respondents (75) indicated that their state did NOT have a legislative oversight office, 43 of these respondents were in error as their states HAD such an office; similarly 9 of the 165 persons who indicated that their states had an oversight offices were mistaken as no such legislative office existed in these states (these persons typically named an executive branch entity when asked to designate the unit). Almost half (44%) of the respondents could not address this and subsequent questions about the work of the oversight offices, reporting that they were not familiar enough with the offices to assess their work.

Figure 19. Timeliness, Reputation, Clarity, and Relevance Were Viewed as Most Important Factors

Credibility of Information Sources

	Other	Media	National organizations	NCSL	Federal agencies	Think tanks	Industry groups	Governor's office	Partisan office	Executive branch	Internal legislative reports	State auditor	Program evaluation office
Don't Know	4.7%	4.1%	5.3%	2.2%	5.9%	11.3%	5.3%	5.9%	12.2%	3.8%	3.4%	15.9%	29.4%
Varies	0.9%	37.8%	6.9%	2.5%	2.2%	25.0%	36.6%	24.1%	26.9%	15.3%	7.8%	2.5%	3.4%
Not Very Credible	0.6%	27.8%	0.9%	0.9%	1.6%	18.1%	15.9%	13.1%	25.3%	5.0%	0.3%	0.6%	
Somewhat Credible	0.6%	25.9%	30.3%	22.2%	29.7%	37.2%	38.4%	45.9%	29.4%	58.4%	34.1%	23.8%	14.7%
Very Credible	1.6%	1.9%	55.3%	70.0%	60.0%	7.5%	2.5%	10.0%	3.8%	15.9%	53.4%	50.9%	49.7%

Figure 20. NCSL and Federal Agencies Were Viewed as Most Credible Information Sources

Usefulness of Information Sources

	Other	Media	National organi- zations	NCSL	Federal agencies	Think tanks	Industry groups	Governor's office	Partisan office	Executive branch	Internal legislative reports	State auditor	Program evaluation office
■ Don't Know	4.4%	3.4%	4.7%	1.6%	4.7%	6.3%	3.1%	4.7%	7.8%	2.5%	2.5%	13.4%	25.3%
□ Varies	0.9%	34.1%	12.8%	9.4%	10.6%	27.5%	34.1%	22.5%	21.6%	19.7%	10.9%	10.9%	6.3%
■ Not Very Useful	0.3%	20.6%	4.1%	1.5%	6.3%	18.8%	10.3%	15.6%	30.0%	5.6%	1.9%	7.8%	3.1%
■ Somewhat Useful	0.9%	32.8%	40.6%	35.0%	42.2%	35.3%	42.2%	46.6%	29.7%	48.8%	34.7%	36.3%	31.3%
■ Very Useful	1.3%	6.6%	35.9%	51.6%	35.3%	10.6%	7.8%	9.4%	8.1%	22.5%	48.8%	25.3%	30.9%

Figure 21. NCSL, Legislative, National Organizations, and Federal Agencies Were Viewed as Most Useful Information Sources

Figure 22. Slightly Over Half of Respondents Were Familiar with the Work of Their State's Legislative Oversight Offices

General rating of oversight office work

As shown in Figure 23, the respondents who could rate the oversight offices' work generally gave positive assessments. Over 80% of these respondents indicated that the offices' methodological quality, timeliness, reputation, clarity of findings and recommendations, ability to communicate with researchers, and relevance was strong or moderate. Of these attributes, the timeliness and relevance of the offices' work received somewhat lower ratings (42% and 48% "strong", respectively, compared to over 50% for the other attributes). However, many respondents were unable to rate the offices' work on these attributes.

Figure 23. Respondents Generally Had Positive Overall Perspectives of Work of Oversight Offices

Use of oversight office reports over time

Respondents generally indicated their legislatures either made about the same use of the work of oversight offices' work as in the past five years (45%) or

had increased use of this work (21%). Only 3% of the respondents indicated that legislative use of the offices' work had declined. However, as shown in Figure 24, a large proportion of respondents could not assess whether use of the offices' work had changed over time; in addition, 142 respondents (30%) did not answer this question.

Figure 24. Most Respondents Indicated That Use of Oversight Office Work Had Remained About the Same or Couldn't Assess Trend

Contact with the offices during studies

The respondents generally indicated that they had relatively little contact with their state's legislative oversight offices during the course of its research studies. As shown in Figure 25, only about a quarter of the respondents indicated that they were contacted either usually/always or often by the offices regarding the selection of issues to cover in research studies, and less than 20% were usually/always or often contacted by the offices regarding research designs, the development of recommendations, or the needed timing of reports. Only about a fifth of the respondents indicated that they were regularly provided interim briefings on project progress. The highest degree of interaction occurred with briefings on final reports, but only 39% of the respondents reported usually/always or often receiving such briefings. Almost half of the respondents indicated that they were never contacted by the offices to discuss research design, recommendations development, or the needed timing of reports.

Figure 25. Respondents Reported Relatively Infrequent Interaction With Oversight Offices During Studies

Further, the degree of contact reported by the legislative stakeholders was substantially lower than that asserted by the oversight offices. As shown in Figure 26, while 81% of the oversight offices reported that they usually or often contacted legislative stakeholders to identify the issues that should be addressed by their studies, such contacts were reported by only 35% of the legislative staff respondents. The offices and survey respondents also had widely different perceptions on the frequency of contacts regarding when reports needed to be delivered to the legislature—42% of the offices asserted that they usually or often contacted legislative stakeholders to discuss report timing, but such contacts were reported by only 22% of the legislative staff. The two groups were relatively consistent in their perceptions of contacts regarding research designs and providing interim briefings. Interestingly, the legislative stakeholders reported more frequent discussions about potential report recommendations than did the oversight offices.

Figure 26. Legislative Stakeholders Generally Reported Less Frequent Contact Than Did Oversight Offices

These differences potentially could result from the oversight offices contacting staff other than the survey respondents to discuss their studies. However, as the respondents were senior policy, budget, and leadership staff who are the logical contact points for the offices, these differences probably reflect differences in perception of between the two groups regarding their relatively low levels of contact. As discussed earlier and shown in Figure 15 on page 65, the oversight offices reported that they typically “sometimes” contacted legislative budget, policy, and leadership staff. As shown in Figure 27, most of the survey respondents indicated that they had infrequent contacts with the oversight offices. Only 16% of the respondents (of those who answered this question) reported interacting with the oversight offices on a weekly or bi-weekly basis, and another fifth reported interacts on a monthly basis. The majority of the respondents reported interacting with the offices on at most a quarterly (25%) or semiannual (22%) basis, and 12% reported no contact with the oversight office.

Figure 27. Over Half of Respondents Reported Only Occasional or Rare Contacts with Oversight Offices

Overall perceptions on quality of oversight office reports

Legislative staff respondents (those who answered these questions) generally gave positive overall ratings to reports issued by the oversight offices. As shown in Figure 28, over 60% of the respondents indicated that the offices' reputation was "strong". The offices' methodological quality, timeliness, objectivity, clarity, and relevance of reports was rated as "strong" by at least 40% of the respondents, and over 80% of the respondents rated these attributes as either "strong" or "moderate". This is significant as the respondents had indicated that these attributes were critical to subsequent usefulness of policy research in the legislative process (refer to Figure 19). On the aggregate level, the oversight offices and their work are thus generally viewed positively by these key stakeholders. These perceptions were generally consistent between the respondents who worked in leadership, fiscal, or policy committee positions.

Figure 28. Most Respondents Gave Positive Ratings to the Work of the Oversight Offices

As shown in Figure 29, the respondents also generally had favorable perceptions of how the work of the oversight offices was used in the legislative process. While a large proportion of survey respondents did not answer these questions, those legislative staff that did answer them (around 55% of the total survey respondents) generally gave the offices' positive assessments on the quality and legislative use of their work. The offices received the highest ratings (where the greatest percentage of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statements) in response to statements that relevant legislative staff and legislators receive copies of the office's work (92%), the offices' work is objective (88%), legislators and staff cite the offices' work in their policy discussions (85%); the offices' work is valuable for legislative oversight (83%), and the offices do a good job evaluating programs and policies (81%). The lowest overall ratings of the offices' work was in response to statements that the offices help the legislature understand policy issues (42% agreed or strongly agreed), the legislature generally implements office recommendations (38%), the offices help the legislature understand policy issues (37%), the offices are a good source of short-term research (36%), and the offices help the legislature set its issue agenda (36%). These perceptions did not vary significantly between the respondents who worked in leadership, fiscal, or policy committee positions.

Figure 29. Respondents Generally Had Favorable Assessments on Characteristics of Oversight Office Work

Tests of hypothesis

While the oversight offices as a group were generally viewed positively by the legislative stakeholders who responded to the survey, the question that remains is “do the behavioral differences among the oversight offices regarding their efforts to build strong networks with key legislative stakeholders and to market their work have practical consequences in terms of how their work is viewed and used within the legislative process?” Theory predicts that offices with high utilization scores will be viewed as more valuable in the legislative process than offices with lower utilization scores. Statistical tests support this theory, finding that offices that make greater use of the utilization strategies prescribed by literature do in fact receive more positive assessments than the offices that made lower use of these techniques.

To test the relationship between the oversight offices’ utilization strategies and the perceptions of their key legislative staff stakeholders, a series of T-tests were conducted to compare mean satisfaction index scores with the mean utilization strategy index scores of the oversight offices. Because many of the respondents indicated that they were not familiar enough with the work of the oversight offices to assess their work, there were insufficient responses to assess these relationships for individual offices. Accordingly, the analyses were conducted on aggregated groups of oversight offices that have specified characteristics rather than individual offices themselves.

The study examined six aspects of the legislative staff stakeholder’s perspectives of the oversight offices:

- the **working relationship** between the legislature and the oversight offices;
- the **office’s value**—how valuable the offices’ work is to their parent legislatures;
- the **process/enlightenment value** of the offices’ work (use in policymaking);

- the **implementation value** of the offices' work (the legislature implements office recommendations;
- the **legitimatization value** of the offices' work (using the offices' work as a rationale for policy decisions; and
- the **total legislative value** of the offices' work (sum of the other five indices).

These indices were developed based on stakeholder survey responses to questions related to their assessments of these characteristics of the oversight offices (see Chapter 3).

As shown in Table 16, there was wide variation in the stakeholder ratings of the oversight offices on each of these indices—the highest rated offices received scores at least double those of the lowest-rated offices. As Implementation Value was based on a single question and Legitimization Value was based on only two questions, the range of scores on these indices was correspondingly narrower than those indices that were based on a larger number of questions.

Table 16
There Was a Wide Range of Stakeholder Assessments of Oversight Offices

Index Score Category	Average Score	Lowest Score	Highest Score
Working Relationship (n=108)	26.82	15	35
Office Value (n=109)	42.78	24	55
Process Value (n=119)	25.16	12	35
Implementation Value (n=121)	3.33	1	5
Legitimatization Value (n=135)	7.84	3	10
Total Legislative Value (n=89)	106.92	55	139

This study assessed the overall relationship between the oversight offices' utilization index scores and their stakeholder assessment scores, and also analyzed subgroups of offices to identify differences between Type 1 and Type 2 offices and the offices that had adopted different types of research standards.

Relationship between utilization and stakeholder scores

As shown in Table 17, an OLS regression analysis found that there was a statistically significant relationship between oversight offices' utilization index scores and stakeholder perceptions of the value and use of their research products. Accordingly, Hypothesis 16, which predicted that oversight offices that sought closer working relationships with key legislative stakeholders would be more highly valued by these stakeholders, was supported by this study. Offices with higher stakeholder index scores utilization index scores received more positive assessments of their working relationships with key legislative stakeholders and the impact of their work in the legislative process; the Beta value shows that for every additional stakeholder index point of an office, it received on average .90 additional working relationship, .266 office value index points, .156 process/enlightenment index points, and .282 total legislative value index points. These relationships were statistically significant for the total stakeholder value, working relationship, and office value index scores at the $p < .05$ level, and at the $p < .06$ level for process/enlightenment use.

These findings support the concept that forming strong network linkages between oversight offices and their key legislative staff stakeholders is important—the offices that aggressively reach out to this stakeholder group are viewed as having more positive working relationships and more influence in the legislative process. While stakeholder network scores were not significantly related to implementation or legitimization use index scores; this could be in part due to the limited development of these constructs which were measured by only one or two questions. However, it is interesting to note that the oversight offices' marketing index scores were significantly related to legitimization use index scores. This could indicate that the legislators and staff will be more likely to claim that they used oversight office reports as a reason for their decisions if the offices aggressively ensure that these key stakeholders are aware of their work products.

Table 17
Oversight Offices' Utilization Index Scores Are Significantly Related to Stakeholder Perceptions of the Offices' Value and Use in Legislative Process

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients		t/F	Significance
	B	Standard Error		
Dependent - Total Legislative Value Index				
Constant	27.119	.466	58.158	.000
Networking Index	.282	.089	3.169	.002
Marketing Index	-.036	.074	-.487	.628
Model		4.59058	6.907	.002
Model R ² = .127; Adj R ² = .109 n=97				
Dependent – Working Relationship Index				
Constant	107.345	1.831	58.631	.000
Networking Index	.900	.351	2.564	.012
Marketing Index	.251	.211	.285	.439
Model		16.21553	F=8.187	.001
Model R ² = .175 ; Adj R ² = .154 n= 79				
Dependent - Office Value Index				
Constant	43.010	.686	62.721	.000
Networking Index	.266	.132	2.022	.046
Marketing Index	.133	.122	1.194	.236
Model		6.62923	7.442	.001
Model R2 = .141; Adj R2 = .122 n=93				
Dependent - Process/Enlightenment Use Index				
Constant	25.374	.433	58.577	.000
Networking Index	.156	.082	1.901	.060
Marketing Index	.099	.069	1.431	.155
Model		4.49579	7.491	.001
Model R2 = .125 Adj R2 = .108 n=107				
Dependent – Implementation use Index				
Constant	3.367	.072	46.714	.000
Stakeholder Index	.017	.013	1.298	.197
Marketing Index	-.007	.012	-.641	.522
Model		.80203	.856	.427
Model R2 = .014; Adj R2 = .002 n=121				
Dependent – Legitimization Use Index				
Constant	7.938	.120	66.028	.000
Networking Index	.024	.023	1.077	.284
Marketing Index	.039	.019	2.012	.046
Model		1.33851	6.089	.003
Model R2 = .091; Adj R2 = .076 n=123				

Impact of office type and norms

Including the type of standards followed by the offices and office type (Type 1 and Type 2) as dummy variables in the regression model achieved slightly higher adjusted R^2 values (for example, .164 with the total stakeholder value index as the dependent variable) but none of the independent variables were statistically significant. This occurred due to substantial shared variance between utilization index scores, office type, and research standards; this is not surprising given the prior findings that office networking and marketing activities are strongly related to office type and standards.

To test the relationship between stakeholder perceptions and office type and standards in light of this multicollinearity, bivariate analyses were conducted between these variables. These tests found that office type and standards were significantly related to stakeholder perceptions of office value and influence. As shown in Table 18, the Type 1 offices, which are located within traditional financial auditing units, received significantly lower value index scores than did those Type 2 offices located within legislative offices. These differences were statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level for office value, process/enlightenment use, working relationships, and total legislative value indices, and close to this statistical significance level for implementation use ($p < .059$).

Hypothesis 17 had predicted that legislative stakeholders would not view the information provided by oversight offices that had adopted the Government Auditing Standards as more credible than the information produced by offices that had not adopted these standards. This is an important issue, as the offices that have adopted the Government Auditing Standards do so at a cost—this study has shown that such offices are less proactive in forming stakeholder networks and marketing their work and are viewed as less valuable and having less impact on the legislative process than offices that have not adopted this set of standards.

Table 18
Oversight Offices That Follow the Government Auditing Standards
Have Lower Stakeholder Perceptions of their Value

Office Type	Mean	Standard Error	T	Significance
Office Value Index				
Auditor (n=28)	37.4242	.98668		
Legislative (n=70)	40.5000	.84975	-2.292	.024
Process/Enlightenment Use Index				
Auditor (n=35)	23.3143	.69906		
Legislative (n=63)	26.1905	.62376	-2.916	.004
Implementation Use Index				
Auditor (n=33)	6.3030	.26998		
Legislative (n=66)	6.9242	.18613	-1.911	.059
Legitimization Use Index				
Auditor (n=44)	7.7273	.19059		
Legislative (n=80)	8.0625	.16240	-.866	.388
Working Relationship Index				
Auditor (n=28)	24.4643	1.02674		
Legislative (n=70)	28.3857	.49607	-3.856	.000
Total Legislative Value Index				
Auditor (n=24)	99.2917	3.45073		
Legislative (n=56)	112.2321	2.21901	-3.177	.002

Table 19 shows that the internal research norms of the offices, which was found to be related to their utilization activities, is also strongly related to stakeholder perspectives of the offices and their work. Legislative staff stakeholders uniformly gave lower ratings to offices that had adopted the Government Auditing Standards, likely due to these offices' substantially lower use of strategies to establish close networks with these stakeholders and to market their work. These differences were statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level for the Process/Enlightenment, Relationship, and Total index scores, and was almost at that level ($p < .059$) for Office Value. Differences among the offices for Implementation and Legitimization index scores followed the predicted pattern but were not statistically significant, likely due in part to the limited measurement of these constructs in the survey.

Table 19
Oversight Offices That Follow the Government Auditing Standards
Have Lower Stakeholder Perceptions of Their Value

Standards Used	Mean	Standard Error	T	Significance
Office Value Index				
<i>Government Auditing Standards</i> (n=45)	41.5682	1.00758		
Other Standards (n=50)	44.5200	1.01589	-1.975	.052
Process/Enlightenment Use Index				
<i>Government Auditing Standards</i> (n=43)	24.0930	.60618		
Other Standards (n=65)	26.3538	.62574	2.473	.015
Implementation Use Index				
<i>Government Auditing Standards</i> (n=48)	3.4000	.21209		
Other Standards (n=64)	3.3514	.19412	.331	.742
Legitimization Use Index				
<i>Government Auditing Standards</i> (n=52)	7.7692	.18343		
Other Standards (n=72)	8.0694	.16938	-1.186	.238
Working Relationship Index				
<i>Government Auditing Standards</i> (n=40)	25.9250	.86409		
Other Standards (n=58)	28.1897	.55188	-2.317	.023
Total Legislative Value Index				
<i>Government Auditing Standards</i> (n=33)	103.7879	3.00812		
Other Standards (n=47)	111.5532	2.52898	-1.975	.052

Unfortunately, this study could not directly test hypothesis 17 given the responses to the legislative staff survey, which showed a substantial level of uncertainty regarding what standards the offices had adopted. As shown in Figure 30, when asked whether the research standards adopted by their states' oversight office affected legislative use of the offices' work, about a third of the respondents responded positively while about a fifth disagreed. However, over 40% of the respondents could not express an opinion on whether research standards affected use of office products.

Figure 30. Slightly Over a Third of Respondents Believed Oversight Office Research Standards Affected Use of Reports

Further, most respondents could not name the standards their state's oversight office was actually using. As shown in Figure 31, over two-thirds of the respondents could not identify these standards. Additionally, fully a third (11 of 33) of the respondents who identified specific research standards gave incorrect answers—they identified standards that were different from those that the offices had actually had adopted. Thus, it is likely that the respondents believed that the offices' adherence to codified research standards promoted the credibility of their work, rather than a perception that following a specific set of standards was preferable. This indicates that the offices can achieve a legitimacy gain by advertising that they follow codified research standards, but that advertising a specific set of standards probably has little impact on the perceptions of key legislative staff.

Figure 31. Over Two-Thirds of Respondents Could Not Name Standards Used by Their States' Oversight Office

Conclusion

While the legislative staff who responded to the survey generally gave positive assessments of the oversight offices and their work, these perspectives were highly influenced by the offices' efforts to engage these key stakeholders. Offices that made greater efforts to establish networks with legislative stakeholders received more positive assessments of their working relationships and higher ratings of the impact of their work in the legislative process; OLS regression models show that a linear relationship exists in which offices' stakeholder satisfaction ratings increase as their network index scores increase; the offices received on average .90 additional working relationship, .266 office value, .156 process/enlightenment, and .282 total legislative value index points for every additional networking index point, and this relationship explains 15.4% of the variation in the offices' overall stakeholder value index scores. Office marketing activities do not appear to be as closely related to perceptions of their working relationships and impact, with the exception that legitimization use appears to be greater for those offices that more aggressively market their work.

However, the oversight offices' behavior in reaching out to key legislative stakeholders and marketing their work are highly constrained by their institutional design and norms. Oversight offices located in financial auditing organizations and that have adopted the *Government Auditing Standards* appear to be at a substantial disadvantage in their quest for This finding is significant to the development of a broader understanding of evaluation utilization, as discussed in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

This study has examined a major subset of program evaluation and policy analysis organizations—state legislative oversight offices—and identified substantial variation in how these units interact with their environment. As a group, the offices seem to be divided by two long-standing visions. First, about half of the offices are characterized by a logical positivism vision and aspire to be seen as above the fray, holding that strict organizational independence is essential to being able to speak truth to power. These offices tend to avoid close contacts with stakeholders, evidently fearing that such network interactions could lead to pressures that could affect their strict objectivity. A second group of offices aspire to a vision of serving as trusted advisors to policymakers, and are willing to sacrifice some independence in order to gain access and trust while still speaking truth to power. This study found that the choice between these differing visions has practical consequences—offices that are more engaged with their legislatures have greater reputations for positive working relationships and are seen as more influential in the legislative process than are the offices that adhere to a dogma of strict independence.

The importance of this outcome is magnified as state legislative oversight offices are now facing much more complex and challenging environments than when most were created in the 1960s and 1970s. In the field's infancy, there was a general consensus that more information was needed to improve legislative policymaking, and there was a belief that speaking truth to power would win the offices both friends and influence. The experiences of the past 40 years have lifted the veil of naïveté on which this perspective was based, and have provided much greater insight into the nature of the policy process and how research information is used within the legislative process. Strategic use of this insight is critical, as the milieu in which the offices operate is becoming more challenging. Many offices are now facing legislative term limits that erode

institutional memory and capacity, greater partisanship which makes winning policy debates more valued than independent information that promotes open deliberation, and increased competition from other sources of often ideologically based policy research. Oversight offices must be able to quickly prove their worth as honest information brokers to new actors who quickly shift in and out of political and policy positions, and the offices can easily be seen as political impediments to be removed if they provide policy advice that is unwelcome. These offices operate in minefields in which missteps can be fatal, and offices in five states reported serious efforts to modify or eliminate their functions in recent years. One of these offices lost this battle and has been eliminated, attesting to the high stakes in the game now being played.

There is good news and bad news...

Returning to the questions posed at the beginning of this dissertation—“why don’t policymakers seem to use the results of evaluations and policy analyses?”, and “what if anything, can evaluators and analysts do to increase legislative use of their work?” this study found both good and bad news that can be generalized to the larger population of program evaluation and policy analysis organizations. The good news that extends prior research on research utilization in legislatures is that key stakeholders report that program evaluations and policy analyses are often used in the policy process. This use often occurs in indirect ways by helping to educate staff and legislators about issues, informing and shaping the debate about policy options, contributing to the slow evolution of how issues are viewed over time, and sometimes providing a veneer of rational justification that helps politicians legitimize decisions that are made for other reasons. Policy research is being used, just not the way that practitioners would prefer this to occur—in a rush of action accompanied by a generous outpouring of public thanks from the policymakers they have served.

Further, this study has found that many of the prescriptions that have been made by theorists identifying steps evaluators and analysts should take to

maximize the use of their research products are in fact on target—when used these steps appear to be effective in promoting stakeholder satisfaction with and use of program evaluations and policy analyses. This is an important contribution of this study that fills a major gap in utilization theory. Prior to this study there was little scholarship on whether evaluators and analysts were using the techniques that have been prescribed by theorists over the years, and little data on whether such steps were effective. This study provides a comprehensive census of the utilization activities of a major class of evaluation and policy analysis organizations and tests the results of these offices' different utilization strategies. By identifying a direct linear relationship between the extent of the offices' efforts to establish networks with key stakeholders and these key informants' perceptions of the value and impact of the offices' work, this study gives much needed validation to these prescriptions. The study did not find a similar relationship between the offices' efforts to market their work, but this may be due in large part to the relatively undeveloped measures used to assess office marketing—the indices of marketing activity used in this study suffered from relatively low internal reliability and more precise measures may find more impact. Program evaluators and policy analysts working in other environments – such as academic units, research offices located within government agencies and private corporations, and those working as consultants – are well advised to heed the prescriptions of utilization theorists and strive to work closely with key stakeholder groups, strategically design research products in a way that promotes their ready use, and aggressively market their research products as widely as possible.

However, this study has also identified bad news for both academics and practitioners—we have met the enemy of utilization and they are often us. All too often, evaluators and policy analysts are not taking the steps that are necessary for them to work effectively in the modern policy environment. Utilization theory holds that evaluators and policy analysts who seek to have their work actively used by government policymakers—and virtually all have this goal regardless of whether they work in the legislative, executive, nonprofit, or private sectors—

need to take responsibility for promoting use of their work within the fast-paced policy environment. However, state legislative oversight offices, which have the advantage of being ideally placed to have maximum impact within the chief policymaking branch of government, often are not taking such steps. Many of these offices have minimal contact with key legislative stakeholder groups, are not aggressively marketing their work as prescribed by theorists, and show little desire to do so. The primary driver for these behaviors are internal to the offices, as this study did not find utilization efforts to be related to differences in the political, cultural, or economic environments in which the offices function. Instead, many offices are highly internally focused on maintaining their organizational independence, and this focus is promoted by the formal research standards that they have been mandated to follow if they also conduct financial audits. The result of this inward focus is that these offices' role can be reduced to that of a voice crying in the wilderness. Many of the key legislative stakeholders of these states' oversight offices are relatively unaware of their existence, activities, and products, and those stakeholders that are aware of these offices rate them and their impact materially lower than that received by offices that have not adopted such norms. Like Moses, such evaluators and policy analysts can glimpse the promised land of policy impact but seem precluded from reaching it.

One could interpret this situation as evidence of path-dependency and conclude that evaluators and analysts that have adopted the *Government Auditing Standards* are doomed forevermore to working in the shadows of utilization. As noted by many theorists, organizational behaviors are very difficult to change, both within individual entities and among groups of similar organizations. Population ecology theory, for example, posits that sunk costs, information limits, political constraints, internal operating procedures, and normative agreements make it virtually impossible for organizations to adapt to changing environmental conditions; instead they are subject to Darwinian selection where only those organizations that fit current environmental conditions ultimately survive (Hannan and Freeman, 1977, 1989; Amburgey and Rao,

1996). As discussed by DiMaggio and Powell (1983), pressures to seek legitimacy (in this case by claiming adherence to the generally accepted *Government Auditing Standards*) can create an 'iron cage' of isomorphism that makes it difficult to change behaviors that may no longer be successful. As Perrow (1986) noted, the ability of organizations to adapt is particularly constrained in uncertain competitive situations in which missteps can be fatal, a situation which aptly describes the modern legislative policy milieu in which oversight offices now operate.

Yet, the picture may not be that bleak, and in a strange way represents a potential positive future for the field. This is true for two three reasons. First, while institutional change is difficult, several offices have shown that it can be accomplished. For example, the Georgia Performance Audit Division, which was threatened with elimination in 2005, has taken steps to increase its interaction with its parent legislature and to better focus its work on issues of legislative concern (J. Abbey, personal interview, March 16, 2006). The Florida Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability has substantially changed its working relationship with its legislature over the past 12 years, moving from a highly independent unit located within the state Auditor General to a highly engaged legislative unit that has one of the highest stakeholder index score measured by this study. Part of this change was accompanied by a deliberate switch from adherence to the *Government Auditing Standards* to the *Program Evaluation Standards* as the office's research norm. While the office subsequently faced three years of threats to its existence when the governor proposed to eliminate its budget and/or merge it back into the Auditor General, it managed to survive, perhaps because its relatively strong network connections it developed to its parent legislature after changing its research norms enabled it gained the political support needed to withstand these threats.

Second, while norms play a strong role in the offices' utilization behaviors, path dependency appears to be somewhat less than an iron cage, as substantial variation exists among the oversight offices that follow the *Government Auditing Standards*. Some offices that have adopted these standards are much more

proactive than are others in working with legislative stakeholders—the stakeholder networking index score of oversight offices that have adopted the *Government Auditing Standards* varied by 64%. As a group, the offices are at least willing to discuss the impact of their research norms, as several panels have been held on the role of standards and the need to effectively work with legislators at conferences of the National Legislative Program Evaluation Society.

Third, this study's finding that the political environment in which evaluators and policy analysts operate within is not strongly related to their networking and marketing behaviors can be seen as good news for the overall field as it suggests that external path dependency pressures are not overwhelming. Only one of the external variables examined in this study – party strength – was found to be related to the offices' networking behaviors, and none were related to their marketing activities. This indicates that different environments in which evaluators and policy analysts may work, such as variations in state wealth, policy liberalism, political culture, and party turnover, do not impose straightjackets that prevent them from taking proactive steps to increase their effectiveness. If we have met the enemy of utilization and they are us, we at least have the opportunity to change this behavior.

Implications for academic study and future research agenda

This study's findings have four implications for the study of policy analysis and public administration. First, given the findings of this and other research, the fear expressed by some (Fisher, 2000; deLeon, 1997; Stone, 1997; Dryzek, 1989) that policy analysts and evaluators may gain too much power and become undemocratic philosopher kings is clearly unfounded. This study found that oversight offices received relatively low ratings from legislative stakeholders regarding their influence in the key area of legislative agenda setting, as only 37% agreed with the statement that the oversight offices help set the issues the legislature will address each year. Further, many offices are not taking the steps needed to gain such influence in the political process even such influence were

possible to attain, and they appear highly constrained in doing so. While the offices are viewed positively and as seen as influential, this study supports the conclusion of Shulock (1999) that this influence is generally indirect and involves supporting policy learning and legitimization rather than functioning as a force that must be obeyed.

Second, much more knowledge diffusion needs to take place between academics and practitioners. One of the ongoing challenges facing oversight offices (and other public organizations) is that employees typically have relatively little contact with academic programs and journals once they have received their degrees and begun their careers. As a result, oversight office managers are often at least 20 years removed from current theory when they assume leadership positions. This can make it much harder for the offices to identify and implement new techniques developed by academic research and contributes to path dependency tendencies. This is demonstrated for oversight offices in their perspectives on utilization strategies. Most of the current managers of the offices were trained during the 1960s and 1970s when evaluation utilization was in what I call its field of dreams phase—if evaluators and policy analysts write it, policymakers will seek out and follow the sage advice. Since those days of yore, much research has been done on research utilization and academics have gained a much better perspective on how and under what conditions research is used in the policy process. However, it is not clear that managers of most oversight offices are aware of these theoretical advances or the importance of networking and marketing their work. Discussions that occur on evaluation use at professional conferences of the National Legislative Program Evaluation Society typically focus solely on instrumental use – cases where legislators act on specific recommendations – rather than the broader forms of enlightenment and legitimization use that are widely accepted by current utilization theory. Unless more effective knowledge transfer occurs, it is likely to be another 20 years before oversight office managers are trained in current utilization theory, by which time another set of prescriptions based on new research such as this study would have been developed. To address this situation, more practitioner-oriented

journals need to be established, and academics' efforts to support knowledge diffusion by publishing in these journals should not be viewed as second-class efforts that get little weight in tenure decisions.

Third, public administration programs that are educating the next generation of policy analysts and evaluators need to increase training in key skills needed to operate effectively in the policy world in which the students will work. In particular, training in networking and political negotiation needs to be emphasized. If networking is a key to effective practice of evaluation and oversight, and this study indicates that this is so, incoming practitioners need to understand this importance and, more importantly, how to effectively perform this key task. Academic programs such as those provided at the Florida State University typically stress theory and methodological skills but not negotiation skills. This should change to better equip graduates for the challenges they will face.

Third, a much broader theory of policy research utilization needs to be developed. Current theory has been helpful in prescribing, albeit in a largely non-validated way, a range of networking and marketing activities that program evaluators and policy analysts should take to increase their effectiveness. However, many of these prescriptions are not feasible for many evaluators and policy analysts to adopt. For example, evaluators and analysts working as outside consultants (a large part of the field) generally cannot engage in sustained efforts to build close network contacts with policymakers as their interaction with these key persons typically ends with the completion of individual consulting contracts. If such network contacts are critical to knowledge diffusion and impact, are such evaluators and analysts doomed to the wilderness of marginal impact? Similarly, many evaluators and analysts working within organizations lack the authority to aggressively market their work to stakeholders as this information is often considered to be proprietary to the agency; in Florida most agency internal audit reports, for example, are not released to the media or the legislature.

Finally, this study's findings suggest an agenda for needed future research. Specifically,

- This study's methodology should be expanded to include other types of stakeholders, including legislators, the media and lobbyists, who could have different perceptions about the oversight offices and their impact than do senior legislative staff.
- Better measures of research units' marketing activities need to be developed to more precisely identify these behaviors and analyze their impact on stakeholder perceptions of the value and use of these units' research products.
- Additional comparative research should examine the utilization strategies of other types of evaluation and policy analysis organizations – such research and internal auditing offices within government agencies, nongovernmental think tanks, and academic evaluation centers – to test how broadly this study's conclusions can be generalized to the overall population of evaluators and analysts who work in a wide variety of organizational settings.
- Finally, the research findings should be parsed to determine if there are individual key steps that are most influential in maximizing stakeholder satisfaction and office effectiveness. Ideally, validated best practices should be identified that can be feasibly applied by evaluators and analysts working in all major branches of the field to their effectiveness.

In closing, two classic political statements are particularly poignant to this study's findings. First, as Admiral James Stockdale stated in the 1992 Vice Presidential debate, evaluators and policy analysts need to ask themselves "Who am I, why am I here?" Practitioners who work in oversight offices exist to

meet their legislature's information needs. Accordingly, they must strive to do so effectively and overcome internal normative constraints that hinder accomplishment of this mission. Second, as asserted by Senator Edward Kennedy in his consolation speech to the 1980 Democratic National Convention, "The work goes on, the cause endures, and the dream shall never die". Speaking truth to power is critical work. Legislators and other policymakers need credible and pragmatic research and advice about the policy choices they face, and they have created oversight offices in most states to assist in this task. While the offices are now older than in their enthusiastic but naïve youth, they also have the capacity to be wiser and more effective in their work. Policy analysts and evaluators offices can take practical steps to increase their value to their legislatures. By engaging in strategic networking and marketing activities, the offices can and must rise above serving only as a voice crying in the wilderness without surrendering the independence they need to speak truth to power.

APPENDIX A

SURVEY OF STATE LEGISLATIVE OVERSIGHT OFFICES

National Legislative Program Evaluation Society 2004 Survey of Member Offices

NLPES is conducting an internet survey of its member organizations to update the Ensuring the Public Trust document published in 2000. The survey covers a variety of topics relating to how NLPES offices serve our state legislatures, including organizational characteristics, types of products, staffing, legislative interaction, and also covers how offices use NLPES and NCSL services. Summary data will be published in an updated Ensuring the Public Trust document, which will not identify individual state responses. In addition, the results will likely be used for some academic publications that again will provide summary rather than individual office results.

In addition, we are asking you to update a [one-page profile](#) which will be included on the NLPES website to update the current state profiles.

The survey should be completed by the office director or another person who can provide both budget data as well as perspectives on their office's interaction with their legislature and other stakeholder groups. Most of the questions can be completed quickly; however, we are asking questions about budget and staffing over the past five years that may require some prior preparation to answer. If you need to have more than one person provide input, we recommend printing the survey first. The survey will take between 15 and 20 minutes to complete. You will need to complete the whole survey at one time. You will not be able to complete part of it, save it, and then finish the rest at a later time. If you want a copy of your responses, please print the survey with your responses before you submit it.

There is a question at the end of the survey where you can make additional comments that might be necessary to qualify any of your responses.

State	<input type="text" value="(Select state)"/>
Unit name	<input type="text"/>
Person completing this survey	<input type="text"/>
Title	<input type="text"/>
Telephone number	<input type="text"/>
Fax number	<input type="text"/>
Email address	<input type="text"/>

Organizational Characteristics

Which best describes the organizational placement of your entity?

(check all that apply)

- ☐ Auditor's Office - part of a legislative auditor office that conducts both financial audits and program audits/evaluations.
- ☐ Independent Legislative Unit - an independent legislative unit that conducts program audits/evaluations as its primary function.
- ☐ Legislative Oversight Committee - committee that spends most of its time doing performance evaluations/audits but also performs other legislative staff work.
- ☐ Legislative Committee - committee that conducts evaluations but also spends over half of its time performing non-evaluation functions such as fiscal/budget analysis, bill drafting, or analyzing substantive legislation.
- ☐ Other (please describe)

Does your entity report to a legislative unit?

☒ **YES** What best describes the type of entity to which you report?

☐ Joint legislative committee

☐ Legislative leadership

☐ Other (please specify)

☒ **NO** Our unit does not report to a legislative entity.

To what entity do you report?

Does your state have any other offices that conduct audits or evaluations of state agencies or programs, excluding internal offices that conduct audits for their own agency only?

☐ **YES** Please list the name of the agency and select the types of audits conducted by each.

Name of office/ branch of government (i.e., executive, judicial, legislative)	Financial/ Compliance Audits	Performance Audits/Program Evaluations
--	------------------------------------	--

	☐	☐
--	--------------------------	--------------------------

	☐	☐
--	--------------------------	--------------------------

☐ **NO**

Does your unit conduct performance audits/evaluations?

☐ **YES** How long has your unit been conducting performance audits/evaluations?

Years

How many performance audits/evaluations reports did your unit issue last fiscal year?

Number of performance audits/evaluations

☐ **NO**

How many staff does your unit have allocated to major product types and how has it changed in recent years? If financial and performance staff are combined, please estimate the permanent FTE manpower used for both product types. (Please exclude temporary employees.)

Full-Time Equivalent Positions by Fiscal Year	Performance/ Program Staff	Financial/ Compliance Staff	Support Staff
FY 2003-04			
FY 2002-03			
FY 2001-02			
FY 2000-01			

Does your unit follow specific standards for its work? (check all that apply)

- ☐ Government Auditing Standards (GAO Yellow Book)
- ☐ Program Evaluation Standards (Red Book)
- ☐ American Evaluation Association (AEA) Guiding Principles
- ☐ Other (please describe)

- ☐ No formal standards have been adopted.

Does your office undergo a peer review?

☒ **YES What entity performs your peer review?**

☐ National State Auditors' Association (NSAA)

☐ NCSL

☐ Other (please specify)

☐ **NO**

Legislative Contact

We are interested in how your unit initiates performance audits/evaluations. Please check the methods used to initiate performance audits/evaluations in your unit and give estimates about the proportion of performance audits/evaluations initiated by each method.

Methods	Applies to Your Unit (check all that apply)	Estimated Percentage of Workload
Legislative directive (statutory or proviso)	☐	<div>%</div>
Directive by governing committee	☐	<div>%</div>
Requests from legislative committees or legislators	☐	<div>%</div>
Self-initiated	☐	<div>%</div>
Requests by executive branch (governor and/or agencies)	☐	<div>%</div>
Other (please specify) <div></div>	☐	<div>%</div>

To what extent does your unit contact legislative stakeholders (legislators and legislative staff) during performance audits/policy analysis to discuss and seek input into your studies?

	Usually/ Always	Often	Sometimes	Never/ Rarely
Research issue selection - discussions on what issues to include within each performance audit/evaluation	☐	☐	☐	☐
Research design - discussions on what research design and methods will be used in each performance audit/evaluation)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Recommendation development - discussions on what recommendations will be made in each performance audit/evaluation	☐	☐	☐	☐
Report timing - discussions on when each report needs to be released for legislative use	☐	☐	☐	☐
Interim briefings - discussions on the progress and potential findings of evaluations	☐	☐	☐	☐

How does your unit promote the use of your reports?

Promotion Activities	Usually	Sometimes	Never
Send email advising of pending report releases	☐	☐	☐
Send report copies to relevant committees	☐	☐	☐
Send report copies to all legislators	☐	☐	☐
Send report executive summaries to committees	☐	☐	☐
Send report executive summaries to legislators	☐	☐	☐
Hold briefings for relevant legislative staff	☐	☐	☐
Hold briefings for relevant legislator(s)	☐	☐	☐
Give presentations to relevant substantive/fiscal committees	☐	☐	☐
Send report copies to the press	☐	☐	☐
Hold press conferences	☐	☐	☐
Write press releases	☐	☐	☐

Promotion Activities	Usually	Sometimes	Never
Provide recommendations for legislative action	☐	☐	☐
Provide estimates of the specific fiscal impact (dollar value) of recommended actions	☐	☐	☐
Identify specific statutory sections/provisions that would be affected by recommendations for legislative action (e.g., "this would require amending s. 123.45 of the MyState Statutes")	☐	☐	☐
Draft bill language to implement recommendations	☐	☐	☐
Lobby committees/legislators to implement recommendations	☐	☐	☐
Send copies of reports to Governor's budget office	☐	☐	☐
Other (please specify) <input type="text"/>	☐	☐	☐

Product Types and Activities

We are interested in the types of products and activities conducted by your unit. Please check the types of products and activities your unit routinely performs and give estimates about the amount of total effort they represent.

Types of Products and Activities	Our Unit Routinely Performs (check all that apply)	Estimated Percentage of Workload
Financial/Compliance audits	☐	<input type="text"/> %
Performance audits/program evaluations	☐	<input type="text"/> %
Sunset reviews	☐	<input type="text"/> %
Investigations	☐	<input type="text"/> %
Assessments of performance measures and data	☐	<input type="text"/> %
Fiscal notes	☐	<input type="text"/> %
Bill drafting	☐	<input type="text"/> %
Other (please specify) <input type="text"/>	☐	<input type="text"/> %

What percentage of your unit's performance audits/evaluations are done within short time periods (under two months) to meet specific legislative requests for rapid information?

%

Does your unit publish follow-up studies on previously issued reports to inform the legislature about the current status of recommendations?

☐ **YES** If so, on what percentage of reports is this done? %

☐ **NO**

Does your unit regularly publish (annually or some other cycle) compilations of prior recommendations that have not yet been implemented?

☐ **YES** If so, what type? Please answer the following.

☐ We include all recommendations

☐ Recommendations made to agencies

☐ Recommendations made to the legislature

☐ **NO**

Does your unit track the amount of cost savings recommended in your reports and/or the cost savings achieved through implementing report recommendations?

☐ **YES, our unit tracks cost savings.** Please answer the following.

What amount of cost savings did your unit recommend over the past two years?

\$

What amount of cost savings was realized through implementing report recommendations over the past two years? \$

☐ **NO, our unit does not track cost savings.**

Does your unit regularly publish (annually or some other cycle) a listing of potential cost savings recommended in your reports (including estimated amounts that could be saved from individual recommendations)?

☐ YES

☐ NO

To demonstrate the impact of a situation, does your unit use either real or hypothetical examples of incidents?

☐ YES

☐ NO

Are the majority of your unit's reports

☐ Up to 10 pages

☐ 11-25 pages

☐ Over 25 pages

Has your unit changed its report length in the past five years?

☐ YES, my unit's reports are now

☐ shorter

☐ longer

☐ NO, my unit's reports are about the same size

How does your unit routinely communicate summaries of your reports to key legislative or other stakeholders? (check all that apply)

☐ Hard copies of summaries

☐ Email

☐ Videotapes

☐ Audiotapes

☐ PowerPoint presentations

☐ Copies of published reports

☐ CD-ROMs

☐ Other communication mechanisms (please specify)

☐ My unit does not routinely communicate report summaries

Does your unit routinely contact media representatives to announce published reports via (check all that apply)

- ☐ Fax
- ☐ Phone calls
- ☐ Email
- ☐ Press releases
- ☐ Press conferences
- ☐ Copies of published reports
- ☐ Other (please specify)
- ☐ My unit does not routinely contact media representatives

Product Awareness and Usage

Do you believe the media provides coverage of reports you believe newsworthy?

- ☐ Most of the time
- ☐ Some of the time
- ☐ Seldom
- ☐ Never
- ☐ Don't know

What factors seem to affect which reports are used the most by your legislature? Please list your top three factors for the most.

Do you think your reports are used more, less, or about the same as five years ago?

- ☐ More
- ☐ Less
- ☐ About the same

If the usage has changed, why?

Please rate the following factors influence on how your legislature uses your studies.

Factors	Influence on utilization			
	Strong	Moderate	Little	None
Timing of report release	☐	☐	☐	☐
Methodological sophistication	☐	☐	☐	☐
Unit's general research reputation	☐	☐	☐	☐
Clarity in presentation of study findings (how well report is written and presentations are made)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Relevance of issue and findings to legislators and key staff	☐	☐	☐	☐
Amount of conflict surrounding policy issues covered by report	☐	☐	☐	☐
Existence of advocates for report	☐	☐	☐	☐
Overall level of communication between unit and legislature	☐	☐	☐	☐
Existence of detractor who works to discredit study	☐	☐	☐	☐
Provision of implementation support (draft bill language or fiscal analysis)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other (please specify)	☐	☐	☐	☐
<div></div>				

Legislative Climate

How often does your unit interact (e.g., phone, direct emails, in person) with the following legislative stakeholder groups?

Legislative stakeholder groups	Often (monthly)	Occasionally (quarterly)	Seldom (twice a year or less)
Legislative fiscal committee staff	☐	☐	☐
Legislative policy committee staff	☐	☐	☐
Legislative leadership staff (such as chiefs of staff or leadership-level policy advisors)	☐	☐	☐
Chairs of fiscal committees	☐	☐	☐
Chairs of policy committees	☐	☐	☐
Legislative leaders (Senate president/House speaker, etc.)	☐	☐	☐
Oversight committee such as auditing committee that your unit reports to	☐	☐	☐
Executive branch budget committee staff	☐	☐	☐
Governor's office leadership staff (budget director, chief of staff, Governor)	☐	☐	☐
Other (please specify)	☐	☐	☐
<div></div>			

Has your unit's working relationship with your legislature changed in recent years?

☐ YES How and why?

☐ NO

Ideally, how would you LIKE your unit's working relationship to be with the following groups?

	Should Be Closer	Currently About Right	Should Be More Distant	NA
Legislative fiscal committee staff	☐	☐	☐	☐
Legislative policy committee staff	☐	☐	☐	☐
Legislative leadership staff (such as chiefs of staff or leadership-level policy advisors)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Chairs of fiscal committees	☐	☐	☐	☐
Chairs of policy committees	☐	☐	☐	☐
Legislative leaders (Senate president/House speaker, etc.)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Oversight committee such as auditing committee that your unit reports to	☐	☐	☐	☐
Executive branch budget committee staff	☐	☐	☐	☐
Governor's office leadership staff (budget director, chief of staff, Governor)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Audited agencies	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other (please specify)	☐	☐	☐	☐
<div></div>				

Does your state have term limits for legislators?

- ☐ YES
- ☐ NO

In recent years, has there been a viable threat to eliminate, substantially downsize, or merge your unit with some other unit?

- ☐ YES Please explain.

- ☐ NO

NLPES Services

Which of the following NCSL/NLPES services were useful to your unit in the last year?

Services	Very Useful	Somewhat Useful	Not Useful	Don't Know
NLPES newsletter	☐	☐	☐	☐
NLPES Fall Training Conference	☐	☐	☐	☐
NLPES Question of the Month	☐	☐	☐	☐
NLPES website	☐	☐	☐	☐
NLPES database of program evaluation reports	☐	☐	☐	☐
NLPES listserve	☐	☐	☐	☐
NCSL standing committees	☐	☐	☐	☐
NCSL Annual Meeting	☐	☐	☐	☐
NCSL policy area contact persons	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other (please specify)	☐	☐	☐	☐
<input type="text"/>				

Please indicate how many staff you plan to send to the next NLPES Fall Training Conference.

Number of staff

Please rate how the following factors affect your unit's participation at the NLPES Fall Training Conference.

Factors	Very Important	Important	Of Less Importance
Cost/budget	☐	☐	☐
Travel restrictions, if applicable	☐	☐	☐
Location	☐	☐	☐
Staff time (conference length)	☐	☐	☐
Quality of program and sessions	☐	☐	☐
Time of year	☐	☐	☐
Staff presenting at conference	☐	☐	☐
Other (please specify)	☐	☐	☐
<input type="text"/>	☐	☐	☐

How could NLPES improve the Fall Training Conference or other services it provides to your unit?

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Other comments or suggestions

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APPENDIX B
SURVEY OF STATE LEGISLATIVE STAFF

National Conference of State Legislatures
Survey of Legislative Staff

NCSL is conducting a survey of leadership, appropriations, and research/committee staff regarding how policy research is used in the legislative process. The survey covers the different types of policy research that you receive, the factors that affect how this information is used, and your interactions with NCSL and in-state legislative research units. Summary data will be published, but individual responses will not be identified.

The survey will take between 5 and 10 minutes to complete. Multiple staff from each state are encouraged to complete the survey.

The term “legislative evaluation/performance audit” office (LEPA) in the survey refers to units that many legislatures have established to conduct policy research, program evaluations, and/or performance audits of state agencies and programs. These offices may be separate units or assigned to legislative auditors or oversight committees.

1. What state legislature do you work with? _____

2. What is your position within the legislature? (Check all that apply.)

- ☐ Leadership staff
- ☐ Appropriations staff
- ☐ Committee/research staff
- ☐ Other (please specify) _____

3. How long have you worked with your legislature?

- ☐ Less than one year
- ☐ 1 to 5 years
- ☐ 6 to 10 years
- ☐ More than 10 years

4. Legislative staff often get copies of policy studies conducted by a wide range of entities, including industry groups, “think tanks,” national organizations such as NCSL, and legislative offices. How CREDIBLE is the information you receive from these groups?

	Very Credible	Somewhat Credible	Not Very Credible	Varies	Don't Know
Legislative evaluation/audit office (LEPA)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
State auditor reports (if different from the legislative evaluation/audit office)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other legislative reports (such as fiscal, substantive, or research committees)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Executive branch agencies	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Partisan legislative caucus/offices	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Governor's office	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Industry groups	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
“Think tanks” such as the Heritage Foundation or Progressive Policy Institute	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Federal agencies such as the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
NCSL	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other national organizations such as the Council on State Governments	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Media	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other (please specify) _____	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

5. How USEFUL is the information issued by these groups to your work?

	Very Useful	Somewhat Useful	Not Very Useful	Varies	Don't Know
Legislative evaluation/audit office (LEPA)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
State auditor reports (if different from the legislative evaluation/audit office)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other legislative reports (such as fiscal, substantive, or research committees)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Executive branch agencies	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Partisan legislative caucus/offices	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Governor's office	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Industry groups	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
“Think tanks” such as the Heritage Foundation or Progressive Policy Institute	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Federal agencies such as the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
NCSL	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other national organizations such as the Council on State Governments	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Media	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other (please specify) _____	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

6. How important are the following factors to your legislature's use of policy research studies?

	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Very Important	Varies	Don't Know
Methodological quality	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Timeliness	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Reputation of office publishing the study	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Clarity of findings and recommendations	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The legislature's ability to provide input to researchers doing the study	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Relevance of report to the legislature's information needs	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Relevance of report to legislative staff	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Conflict surrounding the report topic, findings, or recommendations	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Presence of an advocate for the report	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Presence of a detractor of the report	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Next we would like to receive your opinions about research reports you get from NCSL.

7. Please rate NCSL reports on the following characteristics.

	Strong	Moderate	Little	Varies	Don't Know
Methodological quality	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Timeliness	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Reputation of office	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Clarity of findings and recommendations	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Your ability to communicate with researchers	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Relevance of report to the legislature's information needs	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

8. Do you use reports issued by NCSL more, less, or about the same as five years ago?

- ☐ More
☐ Less
☐ About the same
☐ Don't know

If use has changed, why? _____

9. How often do you or your staff interact with NCSL staff (e.g., by phone, direct emails, in person)?

- ☐ Very often (every week or two)
- ☐ Often (at least monthly)
- ☐ Occasionally (quarterly)
- ☐ Seldom (twice a year or less)
- ☐ Never

10. Has NCSL's working relationship with your legislature changed in recent years?

- ☐ Yes (how and why?)

- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know

11. What could NCSL do to increase its value and impact to your legislature?

**The next questions address reports issued by your state's legislative
evaluation/performance audit office (LEPA).**

12. Does your state legislature have a LEPA office?

- ☐ Yes → If yes, please identify the unit(s) _____
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know
- } Thank you very much for completing the survey. The remaining
questions refer to legislatures with LEPA offices.

13. If yes, how familiar are you with the office's work?

- ☐ Very familiar
- ☐ Somewhat familiar
- ☐ Not very familiar

**14. Please rate the reports you get from your state's LEPA office on the following
characteristics**

	Strong	Moderate	Little	Varies	Don't Know
Methodological quality	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Timeliness	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Reputation of office	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Clarity of findings and recommendations	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Your ability to communicate with researchers	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Relevance of report to the legislature's information needs	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

**15. Does your legislature use reports from your state's LEPA office more, less, or about the
same as five years ago?**

- ☐ More
- ☐ Less
- ☐ About the same
- ☐ Don't know

If use has changed, why?

16. To what extent does your state's LEPA office contact you or your staff to discuss issues during its research studies?

	Usually/ Always	Often	Sometimes	Never/ Rarely	Not Applicable
Research issue selection (discussions on what issues to include within studies)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Research design (discussions on what research design and methods will be used in studies)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Recommendations development (discussion on what recommendations will be made in studies)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Report timing (discussions on when reports need to be released for legislative use)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Interim briefings (discussions on the progress and potential findings of studies)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Final report briefings	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

17. Does the type of research standards followed by your state's LEPA office affect how you perceive and use its reports?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Don't know

18. If yes, do you know what standards the office follows? (Check all that apply)

- ☐ Government Auditing Standards ("Yellow Book")
☐ Program Evaluation Standards ("Red Book")
☐ Other (please specify) _____
☐ Don't know

19. How often do you or your staff interact with your state's LEPA office (e.g., by phone, direct emails, in person)?

- ☐ Very often (every week or two)
☐ Often (at least monthly)
☐ Occasionally (quarterly)
☐ Seldom (twice a year or less)
☐ Never

20. What could your state's LEPA office do to increase its value to and impact on your legislature?

21. Please rate the following statements about your state's LEPA office and its work.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
Relevant staff and legislators receive copies of the office's reports	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Relevant staff and legislators read and understand the reports they get from the office	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The legislature can readily set the office's research agenda	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The office regularly meets with staff and legislators to discuss its work	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The office's reports are objective	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The office's work is timely	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Legislators and staff cite the office's work in their discussions on issues	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The legislature generally implements the office's recommendations	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The office can be pressured to say what people want to hear	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The office brings fresh ideas and perspectives to the legislature	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The legislature uses the office's work to understand policy issues	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The office does a good job meeting the legislature's research needs	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
The office's work is valuable for legislative oversight	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The office's work is more useful than that of private "think tanks"	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The office does a good job evaluating programs and policies	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The office is a good source of short-term research and analysis	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The legislature needs more research like that produced by the office	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Legislators cite the office's reports as a reason for their policy decisions	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The office's work is valuable for budgeting	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The office's work helps set the legislative issue agenda	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The office provides a critical review of policy proposals	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The office helps keep agencies accountable to the legislature	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The office does a good job making the legislature aware of its work	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The legislature has enough input into the office's work	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The office is easy to work with	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The office should work more closely with the legislature	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The legislature holds the office in high regard	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The office helps me do my job	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Thank you for your help. A summary of the survey results will be made available through NCSL.

APPENDIX C

HUMAN SUBJECTS COMMITTEE APPROVAL LETTER AND SAMPLE OF INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

Office of the Vice President For Research
Human Subjects Committee
Tallahassee, Florida 32306-2763
(850) 644-8633 · FAX (850) 644-4392

APPROVAL MEMORANDUM

Date: 8/19/2005

To:
Gary van Landingham
111 W. Madison St. Ste. 312
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1475

Dept.: **PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND POLICY**

From: **Thomas L. Jacobson, Chair**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Thomas L. Jacobson".

Re: **Use of Human Subjects in Research**
Legislative Perspectives on Use of Program Evaluation and Policy Research

The forms that you submitted to this office in regard to the use of human subjects in the proposal referenced above have been reviewed by the Human Subjects Committee at its meeting on **7/13/2005**. Your project was approved by the Committee.

The Human Subjects Committee has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk to the human participants and the aspects of the proposal related to potential risk and benefit. This approval does not replace any departmental or other approvals which may be required.

If the project has not been completed by **7/12/2006** you must request renewed approval for continuation of the project.

You are advised that any change in protocol in this project must be approved by resubmission of the project to the Committee for approval. The principal investigator must promptly report, in writing, any unexpected problems causing risks to research subjects or others.

By copy of this memorandum, the chairman of your department and/or your major professor is reminded that he/she is responsible for being informed concerning research projects involving human subjects in the department, and should review protocols of such investigations as often as needed to insure that the project is being conducted in compliance with our institution and with DHHS regulations.

This institution has an Assurance on file with the Office for Protection from Research Risks. The Assurance Number is IRB00000446.

cc: Fran Berry
HSC No. 2005.558

The Florida Legislature

OFFICE OF PROGRAM POLICY ANALYSIS AND GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Gary R. VanLandingham, Director

August 2005

Dear Legislative Staff Member:

As part of a research project jointly sponsored by the Florida State University and the National Conference of State Legislatures, a survey is being conducted of state legislative leadership, appropriations, and research/committee staff regarding how policy research is used in the legislative process. The survey covers the different types of policy research you receive, the factors that affect how this information is used, and your interactions with NCSL and in-state legislative research units. Information obtained during the course of the study will remain confidential, to the extent allowed by law. Summary data will be published, but individual responses will not be identified in publications.

The survey is completely voluntary. If you have any questions, please contact Gary VanLandingham at vanlandingham.gary@oppaga.fl.gov or Dr. Francis Stokes Berry, Supervising Professor at fberry@garnet.acns.fsu.edu.

111 West Madison Street ■ Room 312 ■ Claude Pepper Building ■ Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1475
850/488-0021 SUNCOM 278-0021 FAX 850/487-3804
www.oppaga.state.fl.us

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Gary VanLandingham

Professional Experience

Director

Florida Legislature, Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability, Tallahassee, FL

2003–present

Provided strategic direction and managed the nation's largest state-level legislative policy research and evaluation office, with 86 staff and \$8.3 million budget. Re-engineered work processes to produce 80% increase in number of research reports issued annually. Substantially enhanced the office's working relationship with legislative leadership and members to ensure that research products met legislative information needs. Directed and mentored management staff to focus organizational culture on value-added activities. Served as Interim Director 2003-2005 prior to confirmation by Legislature.

Deputy Director

Florida Legislature, Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability, Tallahassee, FL

1996-2003

Managed OPPAGA's internal operations to ensure that research studies were completed within budget and met quality standards. Coordinated staff development activities, including staff recruitment, training, and performance appraisal. Represented OPPAGA to external groups.

Policy Coordinator

Florida Legislature, Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability, Tallahassee, FL

1982–1996

Managed unit conducting policy analyses and program evaluations of state government programs. Coordinated and facilitated teams identifying research issues and implementing research designs. Monitored project progress and edited reports to the Legislature detailing research findings and recommendations. Mentored and trained staff. Unit consistently exceeded Office quality and productivity standards. Worked closely with legislative committees and provided liaison with executive agency managers. (Assistant Program Audit Supervisor 1987-1992, Senior Auditor 1984-1987; Auditor, 1982-1984).

Evaluation Specialist

Leon County School Board, Tallahassee, FL

1981–1982

Evaluator and testing coordinator for District Title 1 program in 18 schools.

Technical Researcher

Office of Evaluation, Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services, Tallahassee, FL

1980-1981

Member of team evaluating state child abuse programs; analyzed quantitative data and drafted reports to DHRS Secretary.

**Professional
Experience
(cont)**

1979-1980

Governor's Intern

Executive Office of the Governor, Tallahassee, FL

Researched application of various public policy analysis techniques in Florida government. Also tracked issues and assignments within the Governor's Office and agencies.

Education

Doctor of Philosophy, Public Administration, Askew School of Public Administration and Policy, Florida State University, 2006
Concentration in public policy

Master of Arts, Public Administration, Florida State University, 1980, Concentration in program evaluation methods

Bachelor of Arts, Political Science, University of Florida, 1979 (High Honors), Concentration in public administration and political research

Legislative Staff Management Institute, University of Southern California/Sacramento State University 2005; University of Minnesota 1998

Certified Internal Auditor (Certification No. 020167)

**Associations
and Honors**

National Conference of State Legislatures. Executive Committee member, 2003-2006; Assembly on State Issues Vice-Chair 2001-02; Partnership of Parliaments Germany Study Tour, 2005; International Technical Assistance Team to Nigerian National Assembly 2000; Fiscal Affairs Committee Staff Chair 1999-2000, Vice-Chair 1998-99; Legislative Staff Coordinating Committee 2003-2007, 2001-02, 1998-99

National Legislative Program Evaluation Society *Chair*, 1998-99; *Past Chair* 1999-2000; *Executive Committee* member 1997-2000

Southeastern Evaluation Association, *President*, 2004-05; *Past President* 2005-06; *President Elect*, 2003-04, *Executive Board* member, 2002-2006

Legislative Staff Achievement Award, National Conference of State Legislatures, 2000

Raul P. De Guzman Award for Outstanding Doctoral Seminar Paper, Florida State University, 2006

Public Service Fellowship, Florida State University, 1979-80

Two-Year Scholar Outstanding Graduate Award, University of Florida National Alumni Association, 1979

**Associations
and Honors
(cont)**

Phi Kappa Phi Scholarship Honorary

Phi Alpha Alpha Public Administration Honorary

Phi Sigma Alpha Political Science Honorary

President's Honor Role/Deans List 1975-1980

Scoutmaster, Boy Scout Troop 23, 2000-2003

Publications

VanLandingham, Gary (forthcoming). "A Voice Crying in the Wilderness – Legislative Oversight Offices' Efforts to Achieve Utilization". *New Directions in Evaluation*

VanLandingham, Gary and Wellman, Martha (forthcoming) "Performance-Based Budgeting in Florida: Great Expectations, More Limited Reality" (book chapter)

VanLandingham, Gary; Wellman, Martha; Andrews, Matthew. (2005). "Performance-Based Budgeting in Florida - Useful But Not a Panacea", *International Journal of Public Administration* 28: 233-253

VanLandingham, Gary (2005). "When the Equilibrium Breaks, the Staffing Will Fall – Effects of Changes in Party Control of State Legislatures and Imposition of Term Limits on Legislative Staffing" *Journal of the American Society of Legislative Clerks and Secretaries* 11(1): 27-43.

VanLandingham, Gary and Fran Berry "Re-visiting the Field: Assessing PB² in Florida Ten Years Later" (2004). *PA Times* 27(2)

Recent conference presentations

"Meeting Legislative Information Needs in Oversight Studies", National Legislative Program Evaluation Society, Park City, Utah, September 27, 2006;

"Speaking Truth to Power - How Oversight Reports are Viewed by Legislative Stakeholders, National Conference of State Legislatures Annual Meeting, Nashville, Tennessee, August 15, 2006;

"Speaking Truth to Power - The Art and Science of Communicating With Key Government Stakeholders", Southeast Intergovernmental Audit Forum, Charlotte, North Carolina, April 27, 2006;

"Key Factors in Promoting Utilization", Southeast Evaluation Association, Tallahassee, Florida, February 3, 2006;

"Performance Measurement Systems - Helpful but not a Panacea, National Conference of State Legislatures Annual Meeting, Seattle, Washington, August 5, 2005;

"When the Equilibrium Breaks, Staffing will Fall", Florida Political Science Association, Tallahassee, Florida, January 2005;

"Using Performance Measures to Identify Effective Programs", Fiscal Chairs Seminar, National Conference of State Legislatures, Charleston, South Carolina, December 8, 2004;

"Speaking Truth to Power - Are Evaluators Following Strategies Proposed by Research?", American Evaluation Association, Atlanta, GA, November 4, 2004;

“Legislative Oversight as a Means of Promoting Political Accountability of the Administrative State”, Southeast Conference on Public Administration, Savannah, Georgia, October 13, 2003;

“Accountability and Performance Based Management – What is the Real Impact?” Southeast Evaluation Association, Tallahassee, Florida, January 24, 2003;

“Performance-Based Budgeting – Panacea or Pipedream?” Association for Budgeting and Financial Management American Society for Public Administration, Washington, D.C., October 22, 1997.