Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has been the greatest
public health crisis in more than a century.

produced and communicated findings and reports to decision-makers.

Next, the evaluation team solicited names and contact information for representatives of national and regional agencies that engaged with the SEAN network to assist with and/or consume material produced and disseminated by SEAN. The team was able to interview seven representatives of agencies such as the National Governor's Association (NGA), National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO), and National Council of State Legislators (NCSL). These interviews were conducted in February and March 2021. The objectives of these interviews were to understand the processes through which associations and decision-makers in the field engaged with and utilized the information and resources produced by SEAN. These interviews also provide some limited qualitative evidence of SEAN's effectiveness.

To conduct a more systematic initial assessment of the usefulness and reach of SEAN products, the evaluation team collected data from two additional sources. First, the team obtained data on the attendance at SEAN webinars and page views and downloads from NASEM. Second, the team developed a questionnaire to be distributed to participants in SEAN webinars.[2] The survey responses provide insight into how policymakers and their support staff who engaged with SEAN received and used the materials presented.

This report presents findings of these process and outcomes evaluations. We first discuss the objectives, inception, and structure of SEAN. We then describe the early activities of SEAN and its initial network building. The main body of the report will focus on processes, activities, and outcomes of SEAN during the period May 2020 through May 2021, when SEAN was producing and communicating advisements to decision-makers on a variety of topics. Finally, the report will offer brief lessons learned and recommendations. The evidence on which the narrative is drawn will be described within the report, including document review, individual and

social, behavioral, and economic sciences (SBE) to address the social and economic disruption wrought by COVID-19, NSF proposed to NASEM that they create a complementary entity, the Societal Experts Action Network. The purpose of the group would be to assist policymakers at all levels of government in addressing the complex questions raised by the pandemic by consulting, integrating, and communicating the best evidence from SBE fields. NSF and NASEM staff worked with new and existing members of the Standing Committee, along with .8 (g C)-0.8 (o)14.6 (m)-9.1 (m)2 (d c)1

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the archive has shared weekly summaries of studies

on sharing evidence regarding vaccine efficacy and confidence. SEAN has also focused efforts on unexpected or urgent crises that intersect with the COVID pandemic. In February 2021, SEAN released materials on how to safely evacuate residents of areas affected by natural disasters during the pandemic (NASEM 2021a). This followed in the wake of a series of events requiring evacuations or sheltering, including hurricanes, floods, and exceptional cold.

SEAN advisements on these topics were shared with the public through either webinars or published reports, and often both. Publications were released as informal documents or Rapid Expert Consultations from the National Academies Press and were freely available on the NASEM website. Most were released

in concert with a webinar on the topic. Some were standalone documents or bridged multiple webinars. In Table 2, we present data on the timing and topics of SEAN publications.

For all advisories, summary materials were also provided and maintained on SEAN's website. These summary materials included news releases related to all webinars and reports released by SEAN.[7] Webinars were hosted and publicized by NASEM

TABLE 3: SEAN Webinars: August 2020 – May 2021	
Topic Area	*Date*
Understanding COVID-19 Data - What Decision Makers Need to Know	August 6, 2020
Preventing the Spread of COVID-19 in Correctional Facilities	August 20, 2020

publication. Reviewers were typically asked to review within 48 hours, a much shorter timeframe than typical NASEM review periods. SEAN interviewees felt as though the reviews were high quality and noted that products usually underwent substantial revision as a result. Once products were finalized, SEAN was responsible for conveying a finished product to any internal or external requestor and policymakers more broadly, as well as engaging the policy-interested public. To do so, SEAN relied primarily on its website, existing NASEM publicity channels, and its partner organizations (discussed in the next section).

The process described above is embedded in the structure of NASEM for producing consensus study reports. Interviews with members of the Executive Committee indicated that this process was successfully expedited—SEAN frequently completed products within a few weeks[9]—in service of responding to urgent societal needs brought about by the pandemic. Despite the shortened timeline, interviewees—including organizations using SEAN products—felt that NASEM's standards for providing high-quality evidence were upheld. SEAN's ability to deliver a high-quality product quickly appeared to depend on several factors. First, from a practical perspective, written products were much shorter than NASEM consensus reports and relied on fewer authors. Second, interviews with Executive Committee members and NASEM staff made clear that those most heavily involved with SEAN often worked unusually long hours

conducted multiple interviews to better understand
this process and learn the professional associations'
perceptions of SEAN. SEAN's objectives were
to engage with policymakers in various settings
and levels across the nation and provide clear
and evidence-based guidance for addressing the
problems they confronted because of the pandemic.
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thresholds" that could trigger policy changes in real time. These included questions on when to implement mask mandates, restrictions on public or private gatherings, and capacity restrictions at retail businesses and restaurants.

Second, early in the pandemic, a foremost concern for leaders at the city, county, and state levels was _____ for their constituencies. These concerns included understanding how the pandemic would affect businesses and industries, especially in terms of revenue and employment. Cities and counties were concerned about the impact of a pandemic-induced recession on demands for local social services. Representatives from state-level stakeholder groups shared these concerns, but also highlighted uncertainty about fiscal implications of decreased economic activity.[12]

A third group of concerns for stakeholder groups centered around _____ _____. These included questions about whether local or state government agencies could maintain in-person office or service functions. They also faced uncertainty about how to safely provide K-12 education during the 2020-21 school year.

Engagement of Stakeholders with SEAN

Representatives from four of the five stakeholder groups reported that NASEM staff had suggested SEAN as a resource for addressing pressing issues for their respective memberships. The representative from the other group reported directly reaching out to SEAN via contacts identified on SEAN's website.

That respondent reported quickly being connected with NASEM staff.

The organizations, with one exception, praised SEAN's availability and receptiveness to their suggestions. Several noted regular contact and dialogue with SEAN staff. Two organizational representatives also noted appreciatively that SEAN Executive Committee and other members volunteered their time to participate in events they

most frequent descriptors of SEAN products were "authoritative" and "timely." Respondents universally remarked on the qualifications and stature of SEAN speakers and authors and the quality of the webinars and reports. Timeliness of SEAN's advisements was frequently mentioned. The evaluation team attributed the frequent use of this descriptor to the correspondence between the topics addressed by SEAN and the problems confronting stakeholders during the pandemic. Interviewees also described SEAN products as relatively easy to understand. Two organizational representatives also noted that it was important to them and their members that SEAN and NASEM were perceived as nonpartisan. One minor criticism raised by two interviewees is that SEAN's written materials and webinars would benefit from including fewer, less redundant, and more action-oriented "take-aways."

All stakeholder groups reported sharing some aspect of materials obtained from SEAN consultations within their organizations. These included sharing SEAN materials via ad hoc messages, standard communication as part of regular updates or newsletters, and sharing within organizational meetings or conferences. The transmission of materials to broader groups through stakeholder networks has the obvious advantage of relaying products and amplifying SEAN's reach. Interviewees also pointed out that this enabled stakeholder groups to refine and target information to suit the needs and tastes of the organizations they represented and their membership. Several of the representatives reported that SEAN reports and—especially— webinars were too detailed or academic for many

members of their organizations. Interviewees noted that elected politicians and many political staffers would not have the time and, in some cases, capacity to engage with the full range of SEAN materials.[13] In short, SEAN webinars and reports were perceived as valuable and appropriate resources for policy advisors and membership groups; however, most policymakers and political advisors would require or benefit from distillation of SEAN materials.

CONCLUSION

In its effort to "quickly provide actionable responses to urgent policy questions," SEAN established a unique process. Its process of identifying topics on which to provide guidance was especially novel. In a departure from NASEM's practice of fielding requests from federal policymakers in Congress and the Executive Branch, SEAN focused its efforts on state and local policymakers and engaged professional associations that represented them. The substantial nature of the dialogue between SEAN staff and policymakers and their representatives appears to go far beyond the norm at NASEM. In creating products, SEAN relied on NASEM procedures but expedited them. Finally, SEAN staff and the Executive Committee worked to create products that could be easily absorbed and, thus, used by the lay public.

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[13] Some of the organizational representatives indicated that they, too, were "time poor." With this in mind, they appreciated receiving emails from SEAN with new materials and other updates, as opposed to being expected to routinely monitor SEAN's website.

policy researcher), these numbers appear impressive,[14] although they are admittedly difficult to judge

TABLE 6: SEAN COVID-19 Survey Archive, Fall 2020 through Spring 2021		
	Nov. 2020	*May 2021*
Materials Maintained in Archive		
Number of Surveys	689	1,048

and slides presented in SEAN webinars were easy to interpret. Only 19 percent reported that the webinar (or webinars) they attended were "too technical." These responses are somewhat different from the perceptions shared in the stakeholder interviews, where concern over the academic nature of the webinars was voiced. This may indicate that stakeholders overestimated concerns that members of their organizations would have difficulty engaging with webinar materials. Alternatively, these differences may be driven by an especially interested sample responding to the web-based survey.

As is also clear in Table 8, survey respondents overwhelmingly reported that the information provided in SEAN webinar presentations was timely and useful. 91 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that information presented in SEAN webinars was useful, and 95 percent similarly agreed on its timeliness. These are unusually high levels of positive response to survey items. Table 9 reports survey results on perceptions of SEAN reports, press releases, and web resources. Among the survey respondents, 44 percent reported reading a published report, 28 percent read a press release, and 15 percent viewed material on the SEAN website. Similar to the nearly universal positive assessment of webinars, 93 percent of respondents reported (agree and strongly agree) that the SEAN materials they accessed were clear. 89 percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that tables and figures in SEAN materials were easy to interpret, and only 18 percent agreed that published material was too technical. Again echoing assessments of the webinars, 94 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the published material from SEAN was timely, and 89 percent reported it useful.

Perhaps the most telling survey responses about the value of SEAN webinars and materials pertain

to whether and how respondents acted on the

CONCLUSIONS

This limited outcome assessment sought to understand the reach of SEAN as well as whether SEAN provided understandable, useful, and timely information. Data on unique page views on the SEAN website, receipt of weekly survey updates, and webinar attendance suggest SEAN was able to establish a broad reach within a few months of its launch. Note also that these data do not include partner organizations' independent dissemination of SEAN's guidance. Survey results indicate that SEAN users were very pleased with the content provided in written reports and ancillary materials as well as in webinars and, importantly, shared and used the information provided. The one exception to an otherwise uniformly positive assessment is that SEAN's webinar audiences likely did not include as many policymakers as initially hoped.

TABLE 8: Survey Respondents' Assessments of Webinar Quality					
	Percent of Respondents who:				
	Strongly Disagree	*Disagree*	*Neither*	*Agree*	*Strongly Agree*
Presentations					
Presentations were clear	1				

TABLE 9: Survey Respondents' Assessments of Report Quality					
	Percent of Respondents who:				
	Strongly Disagree	**Disagree**	**Neither**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**
Products					
Material presented was clear	1	1	6	43	50
Tables & figures were easy to interpret	1	1	10	41	48
Material was too technical	26	36	21	11	7
Information was useful	1	1	9	45	44
Information was timely	1	1	5	39	55

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Since its conception in the spring of 2020, SEAN has accomplished a remarkable amount. In this report, we have documented the quantity, breadth, and reach of its advisements. We have also described how NASEM and SEAN's processes enabled this substantial effort and impact. Here, we distill and highlight some of the narratives that developed during the document review, interviews, and data collection and analysis during the evaluation of SEAN's initial year.

STRUCTURE AND PROCESSES

Lesson 1: SEAN began with a clearly articulated structure and process. As it proceeded, it created complex routines to carry out its work and adapted in response to new information, in some instances creating unanticipated routines, such as a heavy reliance on professional organizations to engage the policymaking community and on its Executive Committee to complete tasks. The combination of structure and adaptation served SEAN well.

Recommendation 1: SEAN would benefit from formalizing its revised structure and processes and considering ways to better utilize its Advisory Group.

TIME HORIZON FOR TASK COMPLETION

Lesson 2: SEAN was able to deliver high-quality products in a short time window by aggressively speeding up typical NASEM processes. This allowed them to deliver products to policymakers in urgent

need of guidance on rapidly evolving questions.

Recommendation 2: The fast pace was both in response to, and made possible by, the pandemic. SEAN staff and members as well as outside experts dedicated unusual amounts of time and energy to the effort in part because of a commitment to public service amid a national emergency. Realistically, to deliver products on similarly short timelines in the future, SEAN may need to increase its staffing and volunteer resources and/or reduce the number of activities in which it is simultaneously engaged at any one point in time.

ENGAGEMENT WITH POLICYMAKERS

Lesson 3: SEAN recognized that dialogue is crucially important in identifying the needs of policymakers. Tapping into established networks and organizations ensured that SEAN had dialogue partners and was efficient. These partners were also valuable because they disseminated SEAN's guidance directly to policymakers.

Recommendation 3: SEAN connected successfully with high-profile organizations representing key policymakers across the country. SEAN might consider expanding the set of organizations with whom they dialogue with an eye toward ensuring a diversity of voices and interacting with groups who may represent underserved communities. SEAN might also consider ways to increase outreach to policymakers at the federal level.

USABILITY

Lesson 4: Policymakers and their staffs engage with evidence differently than policy researchers. SEAN did an admiral job of providing much easily understood guidance for the policymaking community; however, some users suggested that even more could be done to improve the usability of SEAN materials and webinars.

TABLE 10: Survey Respondents by Occupation	
Occupation	*% of Respondents*
Educator	16.6
Researcher	28.3
Public Official	3.2
Employee/Owner, Private Company	9.6

Recommendation 4: Continued attention to how different constituencies seek and consume information is vital. SEAN might consider further efforts to distill its recommendations/guidance, such as providing rank ordered lists of no more than three or four actionable recommendations. SEAN would also benefit from enhancing the accessibility of recommendations and summary briefings on its webpage; each topic addressed by SEAN should have a landing page with easy-to-access summaries of

SOCIETAL EXPERTS ACTION NETWORK (SEAN)

COVID-19 Questions

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, decision-makers at all levels of government have critical questions that can be addressed using evidence provided by the social, behavioral, and economic sciences (SBE). To connect SBE research with federal, state, and local decision-makers, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM), in collaboration with the National Science Foundation (NSF), is establishing the Societal Experts Action Network (SEAN). SEAN will quickly provide actionable responses to urgent policy questions. SEAN is unique in its focus on rapid, readable, and research-based insights on issues such as the reopening of businesses and economic growth, the education of children, the mental health and resilience of our communities, and many more.

SEAN Leadership

SEAN is overseen by the SEAN Executive Committee, co-chaired by Robert Groves and Mary T. Bassett. Both are members of the NASEM Standing Committee on Emerging Infectious Diseases and 21st Century Health Threats. Dr. Groves is executive vice president and provost at Georgetown University, and Dr. Bassett is director of the François-Xavier Bagnoud Center for Health and Human Rights at Harvard University. Dr. Marcia McNutt, president of NASEM, will appoint other prominent SBE scientists to the SEAN Executive Committee to serve with Drs. Groves and Bassett.

Under the SEAN Executive Committee, the SEAN Advisory Group will include prominent leaders from academia, professional organizations, and former policymakers. In coordination with the SEAN Executive Committee, the Advisory Group solicits questions from decision-makers and assists in developing responses, including the identification of relevant expert institutions. SEAN ensures that the most urgent questions receive attention and the most reliable and useful insights are provided to decision-makers and the public.

How SEAN Works

Prominent SBE institutions will quickly assemble a team of in-house experts to gather and synthesize the evidence pertinent to specific questions. SEAN translators, managed by the Federation of American Scientists, will make the concerns of decision-makers understandable to researchers and vice-versa, ensuring that SEAN responses are actionable and relevant to policy decisions. SEAN will also have access to survey data resources, enabling rapid access to appropriate data, as well as the facilitation of new data gathering in response to specific questions. Finally, SEAN communications will disseminate products produced through the network to a wider audience.

SEAN Products

SEAN products will be released by NASEM to the public and offered in a manner that best addresses

Carolina, County Manager of Arlington, Virginia, Director of Health and Human Services in Arlington, Virginia, and Chief Operating Officer of the International City/County Management Associations (ICMA). Courses taught include managing local government, public budgeting and finance, human resources, ethics, policy, and administrative theory. He previously taught similar courses as an adjunct in the George Washington University Trachtenberg School of Public Administration and Public Policy for 19 years. Carlee's focus is on translating theory to practice, especially among local governments in partnership with non-profits, businesses, and direct public engagement. He conducts research and workshops on social equity, agile process improvement, and crisis management. Recent collaborations have included Toyo University, ICMA, Ohio City/County Management Association, Colorado City/County Management Association, and the Virginia Municipal League. Carlee is a Fellow in the National Academy of Public Administration. His holds a B.A. from the University of Montevallo, an M.A. in Urban Studies from the University of Alabama-Birmingham, and a D.P.A. from George Mason University.

Prudence L. Carter is the E.H. and Mary E. Pardee professor and dean of the Graduate School of Education at Berkeley. Her research focuses on factors that both shape and reduce economic, social and cultural inequalities among social groups in schools and society. A sociologist, she examines academic and mobility differences influenced by the dynamics of race, ethnicity, poverty, class, and gender in U.S. and global society. Before being appointed dean at Berkeley, she was the Jacks Family professor of education and professor of sociology (by courtesy) at Stanford University. She was also the faculty director of John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities, and the director of the Research Institute for Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity. Prior to joining the Stanford faculty in 2007, she was associate professor of sociology at Harvard University. She is an elected a member of the National Academy of Education; the Sociological Research Association; and a fellow of the American Educational Research Association (AERA). She also serves on the board of trustees and chairs the Program Committee of the William T. Grant Foundation and is a board member of SOAR (Support, Opportunities, and Rapport) for Youth. She earned a M.A. in sociology and education from Teachers College, Columbia University, and a Master of Philosophy and Ph.D. in sociology from Columbia University.

Michael Dimock is president of Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan fact tank that informs the public about the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world. A political scientist by education and training, Dimock was tapped to join the Center in 2000 by its founding director, the late Andrew Kohut. Dimock became associate director for research in 2004 and director of the Center's political polling unit in 2012. An expert on American political opinion, he co-authored several of the Center's landmark research reports, including studies of long-term trends in American political and social values and reports on views of the candidates, campaigns and key issues during several presidential election cycles. Dimock advanced to the key leadership role of vice president in 2014, overseeing the execution and analysis of the largest U.S. political survey that the Center has ever conducted. The survey provided an in-depth, groundbreaking examination of the nature and scope of political polarization within the American public. Dimock

was named president later that year and has since been instrumental in guiding the Center's research and development efforts to strengthen the practice of survey research and test new methods in data collection and analysis. Dimock received his Ph.D. in political science.

Susan Fuhrman is past-president of Teachers College, Columbia University, founding director of the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE), and past-president of the National Academy of Education. Her work focuses on enhancing the quality of education research, accountability in education, intergovernmental relationships, and standards-based reform, and she has written widely on education policy and finance. Dr. Fuhrman's substantial leadership track record includes her term as dean of the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education from 1995-2006, where she w1.3 (e)2(oo)12.2 (2)-3.8 12.2 (r)21.9 ((r)-26.7 (oo)08 Td[(a))(a)8. tnsh2 (y o)15.2 10.7 (m fw)17.2PtC2-2(698 (e (i)4.9 (v)21.5 (e3.7 (d)8.3(l)1.3 1.308 Td[(a)-15.2 (s 056)11.7 (r)16.9

variety of roles in the Department of Pediatrics at the University of Maryland's School of Medicine. Dr. Holden holds appointments as an adjunct professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Duke University School of Medicine

Linda Langston is president of Langston Strategies Group. Previously, she was director of strategic relations for the National Association of Counties (NACo) and a member of the Linn County (Iowa) Board of Supervisors. In that role she served as NACo's 2013 2014 president and led NACo's efforts on Capitol Hill to protect the tax exempt status of municipal bonds and other legislative and federal priorities. Her presidential initiative was Resilient Counties, which focused on building communities' capacity to be ready, resilient, agile and adaptive in the face of natural,oationto.7 (a)-30.u8.3 (e)11.4 (n)26.2 (t7.2 (i)3.8 (s)-9.62 (n (o)14.7 (n)16.2 (o)17.

David Yokum is the director of The Policy Lab at Brown University, which applies public policy research with state and local governments across the United States, including a special focus on Rhode Island. He was the founding director of The Lab @ DC in the D.C. Mayor's Office and, before that, the White House's social and behavioral sciences team. David earned a J.D. and Ph.D. in psychology with a focus on cognition and neural systems from the University of Arizona, and a master's degree in bioethics and medical humanities from the University of South Florida.

• Determine whether to accept a request for recommendations/guidance from the Standing Committee or another source (for example—has to be non-partisan, SBE has to be able to contribute to the response,n, poy -py -bubus14.73.3 (i)13.7 m td earuhcl4-0.9 ()3.8 Efnnthl to (o)14.7ttte.7 (n)16.2 (c)5.3 (e f)-.8

Dear Friend of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine,

1. Which SEAN webinar(s) did you attend/view? [Check all that apply]

- a. Understanding COVID-19 Data
- b. Promising Strategies for Encouraging the Adoption of COVID-19 Protective Behaviors
- c. COVID-19 Vaccine Confidence
- d. Preventing the Spread of COVID-19 in Correctional Facilities
- e. Health Care and Health Care Financing for COVID-19 in Correctional Facilities
- f. Adoption and Implementation of Campus COVID-19 Testing Strategies
- g. College COVID-19 Testing Strategies: Landscape of Current Testing Strategies
- h. College COVID-19 Testing Strategies: Leadership Considerations in Testing Strategies
- i. College COVID-19 Testing Strategies: Available Tests and Protocols
- j. College COVID-19 Testing Strategies: Consideration for Monitoring, Measures and Data Use
- k. Don't know, or not applicable

2. Thinking about the webinar(s) you checked above, was your attendance:

- a. Synchronous/live?
- b. Asynchronous/recorded?
- c. Both

3. How did you first learn about the SEAN webinar(s)?

- a. Google/internet search
- b. I regularly attend National Academies events
- c. SEAN email/listserv
- d. I saw it described on the NASEM web pages, o7.3 (b)9.e. N/A [s]?

4. We'd like to know about your perception of the webinar(s) you observed. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree

5. Did you share any information you learned in the webinar(s) you attended with colleagues or others? (Yes/No)

In addition to the webinar(s), SEAN shared information and guidance as reports, press releases and interactive web overviews.

7. Have you or your organization changed behavior, policy or practice based on information you learned from the webinar(s) or information obtained from SEAN materials? (Yes/No)

8. We'd like to know about your perception of the SEAN product(s) you viewed. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements.

9. Finally, which best describes your professional position:

    a. Policy analyst/advisor

    b. Public official

    c. Staff member in a professional association (other than NASEM)

    d. NASEM staff member

    e. Researcher in an academic/non-profit setting

    f. Employee/owner of a private company

    g. Educator

    h. Other

Thank you for your time.