

## Recommendations

The cities highlighted in this paper are among those leading the way in using data and evidence to deliver better results and transform the lives of residents. As is evident from the examples, there is no single method for using data and evidence and no one path to innovation. However, we found some common threads in how leaders have been able to overcome the inevitable barriers, and put in place structures and processes to embed using data and evidence in decision making. Below are our recommendations for how to create a focus on data and evidence. They are intended for mayors and other leaders in city government, as well as for leaders in federal and state government and philanthropy as they seek to support cities in this important work.

### Actions for city leaders

#### **Prioritize outcomes from the top**

In collecting data, most cities get stuck on outputs, like the number of residents served through a program, the number of staff with a particular qualification level, or the total amount of money spent on a given service. These types of measures are important, but they are not sufficient for understanding whether programs are having their desired impact.

Shifting a city's focus from outputs to outcomes takes leadership. The leaders we profiled often started by focusing on results in one or a handful of issues. For example:

- Baltimore's Mayor Rawlings-Blake has zeroed in on infant health.
- San Antonio's Mayor Castro has championed kindergarten readiness.
- New York City Mayor Bloomberg has prioritized measuring and alleviating poverty.

While cities can use data and evidence to tackle nearly any issue, leaders must choose a focus.

Next, they sought to ensure that attention to outcomes became the new normal. In Baltimore, the Mayor's office wants to know about impact when considering funding requests. "Today, we can translate how many students are serviced by \$100,000 in investment, and measure their progress toward school readiness," says Jonathan Rondeau of the Family League of Baltimore City. "Having the capability to connect invested dollars to the reduction in the achievement gap is more compelling than simply providing nominal service data." Meanwhile, in New York City, Mayor Bloomberg has brought "a passion for ensuring there would be an improvement . . . and he makes us accountable for seeing these outcomes," says Linda Gibbs, deputy mayor for Health and Human Services.

### **Build the capacity and culture to sustain focus on data and evidence**

Strong leadership from top city leaders alone is not sufficient to ensure that a results orientation will become the norm. To overcome inertia, consistent pressure and clear communication are needed, not just by a city's mayor or chief executive but at other levels as

well. Sophie Dagenais, director of the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Baltimore Civic Site, explains, "You have to have managers who are prepared to heed the call to action and do what it takes to implement new approaches that often require major changes and difficult choices. Staff need to be equipped with the tools and the authority to change both how they work and how they spend their scarce resources." In New York City, for example, Mayor Bloomberg has demanded that agency heads ensure a focus on data and evidence throughout the sprawling city bureaucracy. "You've got to say it, mean it, and follow up on it," says New York City's Gibbs.

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SOPHIE DAGENAIS, DIRECTOR, ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION'S BALTIMORE CIVIC SITE

Holding agency leaders accountable for results is important, but not enough. According to CEO Executive Director Kristin, focusing on results "is increasingly becoming a part of the culture and expectations throughout government. But what more can be done to make sure that people have the capacity to do it?"

The answer, in Denver, New York, and in the other cities we studied, is investment in developing or hiring people with the requisite capacity, capabilities, and orientation to use data and evidence to get better results. To do deep data analysis and research, we found cities mostly relied on outside evaluators or universities. However, to fully develop and sustain their data orientation, cities need their own staff to understand and act on the findings of outside experts.

In Baltimore, CitiStat built a capable staff by recruiting recent graduates from business schools, law schools, and public policy programs, and incentivizing them with fast-track promotions if they performed well—leading some to view these analysts as what former CitiStat Director Matt Gallagher termed "the Jedi Knights of City Hall." Others have focused on improving the data analysis skills of existing staff. When Miami-Dade introduced "data chats," they also equipped school administrators and teachers with the knowledge and methods they needed to thrive in the new system. For its part, London's Project Oracle has focused on training government and nonprofit leaders on the value and use of data so that they can embed a consideration of evidence into their funding and program decisions.

### **Build the systems and processes required to determine and invest in what works**

Motivated and talented people must go hand in hand with systems and processes that institutionalize use of data to steer improvement and inform decisions over time. This does not necessarily mean that cities need to invest substantial sums

to build fancy data platforms. Most of the examples we highlight are innovative in process rather than platform. For example:

- Leaders in Miami-Dade hold quarterly Data/COM conversations with principals of the district’s lower-performing schools to diagnose and discuss trends in the data.
- Baltimore’s CitiStat, which has been copied in many cities, still uses spreadsheets. One of its primary appeals, according to Gallagher, is its low-cost use of off-the-shelf software.
- Some cities have built open data portals in the last several years that aggregate a range of civic data sets and make them publicly available in a user-friendly format.

What’s critical is not merely that the data are available but that they are used. For some of the initiatives we highlight—such as New York’s effort to combat chronic school absenteeism and some of work by Family Services of Baltimore City to improve youth outcomes—that meant developing agreements that allowed data collected by one city agency to be shared with other departments or even with external partners.

To better understand what constitutes strong evidence and create consistency in the interpretation of data and evidence in funding decisions, cities can learn from and adopt existing standards and frameworks. Fortunately, clearinghouses exist that identify programs that have demonstrated results (see the sidebar [“Use clearinghouses to identify interventions that work”](#) on page 33). And frameworks have been developed to help leaders sort out this complicated question of what meaningful evidence is (see the sidebar [“How much evidence do you need to know what works?”](#) on page 30). These tools allow users to assess when a model’s evidence is at a promising but early stage, and when it has been tested more thoroughly and can be scaled with confidence.

Baltimore’s effort to transition to evidence-based home visiting programs demonstrates how a city can use such a framework to select the most effective providers. To inform its funding decisions, the city considered the strength of several evidence-based national models and looked at how different providers have been able to replicate their models with fidelity in other cities. Likewise, in San Antonio, Pre-K 4 SA is using rigorous evaluations conducted elsewhere to select local providers to deliver programs with the best chance of getting results.

Finally, cities should establish rules and processes that ensure high-performing programs will gain support while underperforming programs lose support. This means cities must be prepared to invest in program evaluation and set an expectation that funding could be terminated for programs that do not achieve their intended results. As we saw in the cases of New York’s CEO and San Antonio, leaders set aside significant funds for evaluation. What’s more, New York’s CEO has already defunded seven programs that did not meet performance standards. San Antonio has also established an expectation that underperforming Pre-K 4

SA providers will be defunded. And Baltimore has built a consideration of results into its budgeting process. Ultimately, shifting resources away from less-effective programs and toward more effective ones is essential to making progress on social challenges.

### **Find the right organizational structure to sustain change**

Innovation needs a home. Almost all of the cities we highlighted have given careful thought about the right place to locate their innovative efforts in the use of data and evidence, coming to a range of different answers. In some instances, this involved cross-agency partnerships, such as the one between the Baltimore City Health Department and the Family League of Baltimore that jointly launched B'More for Healthy Babies, or ProvPlan, which functions as a public-private partnership. There can be advantages to locating a city's innovation initiatives outside city government itself, including better access to philanthropic funds, stronger interagency partnerships, and a better chance of sustaining the effort beyond the lifetime of the current administration.

Even when such efforts are within city government, it is vital they work across agency silos and effectively engage external partners. For example, in New York City's CEO, Mayor Bloomberg created a new unit to develop, test, and scale interventions that work. Its design involved partnering with strong external evaluators who brought objectivity and depth of expertise to the work. Reflecting on this structure, Deputy Mayor Gibbs says, "What's unique (about CEO's structure) is that it has created a new kind of capacity to identify and support the development of promising solutions, foster dialogue and support agencies as they implement, hold the providers accountable for achieving results, and determine what approaches to scale up and, importantly, what to scale back." She adds, it's an approach that could be used beyond poverty alleviation. Not surprisingly, cities across the country are starting to show interest in creating their own CEO-type function or agency.

Similarly, Project Oracle in London has involved a large-scale cross-sector partnership, including different government offices, universities, nonprofit providers, and consulting firms. Primary functions of its "youth evidence hub" are to help bridge research and practice by pairing researchers with nonprofit providers and providing training to government officials. Providence is another example of a city where public-private partnerships—from ProvPlan to the Children and Youth Cabinet—have helped sustain a focus on using data and evidence over multiple mayoral administrations.

### **Actions for federal, state, and philanthropic partners to support cities**

The following recommendations are aimed at federal, state, and philanthropic leaders, all of whom can play a critical role in helping cities advance their use of data and evidence.

### **Fund local data infrastructure and know-how**

To make wiser decisions, cities need to have reliable access to data at a granular enough level to identify and prioritize needs and measure program effectiveness. Building or buying the necessary data platforms and hiring people to use them can be costly, but some cities get started with their own seed funding. For example, Baltimore's CitiStat was established with an investment of just \$20,000 in computers and a room in City Hall.<sup>27</sup>

While cities should be prepared to invest at least some of their own funds in such infrastructure, external resources may be necessary to fund data systems and hire expert analysts. In Providence, for example, Bloomberg Philanthropies is contributing \$5 million to fund the measurement and analysis of early language learning among toddlers in low-income families through the Providence Talks program. Bloomberg Philanthropies is also investing \$1 million to build an open-source predictive analytics platform for Chicago.<sup>28</sup>

Federal and state money is also helping to build local data infrastructure. The US Department of Education's Race to the Top competition made data systems a key criterion for funding. And the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act awarded states over \$250 million to design and implement data systems to track students' progress from pre-kindergarten to the workforce.<sup>29</sup> Continued investment of this sort, not only in education but across all domains, will accelerate cities' ability to transform their programs and services through the use of data and evidence.

### **Continue to build the pipeline and support the replication of promising solutions**

For more cities to invest in what works, the menu of promising models must continue to expand. A strong cadre of programs and practices with evidence behind them will make it increasingly feasible for cities to sell the idea of acting in a results-oriented way both inside city government and with residents. Federal and state governments and philanthropy have begun these efforts through initiatives such as the Social Innovation Fund (SIF), Investing in Innovation, state-level grants and programs to incentivize cities to invest in evidence-based programs and/or evaluation, and private foundation support of grantees.

The federal SIF grant to New York's CEO demonstrates how replication funding can spread results from city to city. In this instance, CEO, in partnership with the Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City, secured SIF grants of \$5.7 million per year for five years to replicate its most effective anti-poverty programs in eight urban areas across the country. In those locations, more than 30 local and national

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27 Behn, Robert. "What All Mayors Would Like to Know About Baltimore's CitiStat Performance Strategy," (IBM Center for the Business of Government, 2007), <http://www.businessofgovernment.org/report/Behn-CitiStat>.

28 Bloomberg Philanthropies 2012 -2013 Mayors Challenge, <http://mayorchallenge.bloomberg.org/index.cfm?objectid=7E9F3B30-1A4F-11E3-8975000C29C7CA2F>.

29 Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems factsheet, 2009, <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/slds/factsheet.html>.

philanthropic funders have contributed more than \$50 million to bolster the SIF grants. MDRC supports the effort as the lead evaluation partner and as a provider of technical assistance on program implementation and financial management. This type of investment can catalyze city leaders to adopt and scale proven programs.

### **Help leverage existing research and support evaluation**

As more cities engage in “horizon scanning” to see what models being used elsewhere may work for them, it is increasingly important for city leaders to have access to reliable sources of information on what works. Already, the What Works Clearinghouse and foundation-funded databases are providing this service in some areas. Expanding this work will enable more cities with limited time and resources to avoid reinventing the wheel.

Additional research and evaluation are also needed to address gaps in the evidence base, but the cost of evaluation is prohibitively high in too many cases. While it has been possible for New York’s CEO to set aside 5 percent of its budget for evaluation, and Pre-K 4 SA has set aside about 3 percent of its budget over the next eight years, many city leaders might balk at such expenditures, particularly in a time of budget cuts. It’s worth noting some promising efforts to find lower-cost ways to evaluate models using existing administrative data. The Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy in Washington, DC, is leading much of this work.<sup>30</sup> Government leaders and philanthropists can help this effort by supporting experiments to test new methods of assessing more quickly and inexpensively when a program is working.

### **Fund technical assistance in city government**

As the layer of government closest to the everyday problems people face, city officials provide many of the services people rely on and expect. Embedded support, in the form of research experts, consultants, and dedicated fellowships, can help translate very complicated information and train city officials in the language of data and evaluation. One such initiative is IBM’s Smarter Cities Challenge, a \$50 million grant program that pairs the company’s top talent with city leaders to analyze a city’s data and systems and help officials make better choices. For example, IBM is supporting Louisville Metro Government’s effort to create a data-driven strategy to identify and reduce asthma risk in the city (see the sidebar “[Spotlight on two early-stage initiatives: Providence Talks and Propeller Health](#)” on page 27).<sup>31</sup>

Academia is also a great source for technical know-how. The Harvard Kennedy School recently established a Social Impact Bond Technical Assistance Lab to support cities and states interested in pursuing this approach (see the sidebar

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30 Statement of Jon Baron before the House Committee on Ways and Means, Subcommittee on Human Resources, July 17, 2013, <http://coalition4evidence.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Testimony-before-Ways-and-Means-HR-subcommittee-7.17.13-Jon-Baron.pdf>.

31 “Louisville, United States,” [http://smartercitieschallenge.org/city\\_louisville\\_United\\_States.html](http://smartercitieschallenge.org/city_louisville_United_States.html).

“A new tool for government to pay for performance: [Social Impact Bonds](#)” on page 38). As part of its research efforts, the lab provides pro bono technical assistance to state and local governments considering the pay-for-success approach.