

Executive Summary

Across the country, more and more cities are using data and evidence to get better results for those they serve. To explore this promising trend, [Results for America](#), an initiative of the nonprofit [America Achieves](#), commissioned The Bridgespan Group to interview city leaders and urban experts.¹ We interviewed more than 45 people to better understand how some of America’s most innovative cities are using data and evidence to do more for their residents. This report reveals what we learned.

From dozens of significant innovations underway that make pioneering use of data and evidence, we chose initiatives in six US cities to feature here. Baltimore, Denver, Miami, New York, Providence, and San Antonio all offer examples worth emulating. We also feature one initiative from London. While these are hardly the only examples of innovative use of data and evidence we found in the cities we studied, these examples illustrate the major trends we saw in how leaders are embedding the use of data and evidence into practice. The examples discussed here encompass education, jobs, youth development, and preventing infant mortality—all areas in which data and evidence are being used not simply to increase efficiency but to help transform people’s lives.

Through our research, we identified four significant ways cities are using data and evidence to embrace what works and take advantage of opportunities provided by new technology. Specifically, we’re seeing cities:

1. **Measure what matters:** Miami, Denver, and New York showcase how data can be used to improve outcomes for kids and schools.
2. **Build the evidence base:** New York and London demonstrate how cities can pilot, evaluate, and expand interventions that work—and discontinue those that don’t.
3. **Invest in what works:** San Antonio, Providence, and Baltimore illustrate the value of being a “fast follower,” adopting interventions proven effective elsewhere to efficiently address local needs.

¹ This research was commissioned by Results for America, an initiative of the nonprofit, America Achieves. Results for America seeks to improve outcomes for young people and their families by helping ensure taxpayer dollars are invested strategically with a rigorous focus on data, evidence, and better results, and discouraging continued support of programs that consistently fail to achieve measurable outcomes.

4. **Budget for what works:** Baltimore highlights how one city redesigned its budget process to focus on the most important outcomes and fund programs that get results.

Based on lessons observed from these examples, we make recommendations for city leaders, as well as for federal, state, and philanthropic partners who want to increase the use of data and evidence to spur urban innovation.

Actions for city leaders

- City leaders should **prioritize outcomes** instead of just outputs. The leaders we profiled often started by focusing on results for one or a handful of issues, such as infant health, kindergarten readiness, or school attendance.
- **Build the capacity and culture** to sustain a focus on data and evidence. To get beyond business as usual, consistent pressure and clear communication are needed, not just by a city's chief executive but also at other levels. In addition, key staff must have the skills and commitment to use data and evidence more effectively.
- **Build the systems and processes** required to determine and invest in what works. 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. Cities can learn from and adopt existing standards and frameworks created elsewhere.
- **Find the right organizational structure** to sustain change, whether this means that the initiative is located in the Mayor's office, a city department, a cross-agency task force, or a public-private partnership.

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

- **Fund local data infrastructure and know-how.** To make wiser decisions, cities need reliable access to data at a level granular enough that they can identify and prioritize needs and measure program effectiveness.
- **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.
- **Help leverage existing research and support evaluation.** While budget pressures may limit the ability of cities to conduct full-scale evaluations of their programs, the federal government and philanthropy can help to test and disseminate new methods of assessing more quickly and inexpensively when a program is working.
- **Fund critical technical assistance** for city government, helping cities to translate research findings and training city staff to use data and evaluation.

What if all cities worked with their residents to identify priorities, looked both internally and externally to understand what data and evidence existed regarding models to address these challenges, built and implemented interventions tailored

to their needs, engaged in a cycle of continuous improvement to understand what worked and what did not, and invested accordingly? The case studies presented here demonstrate that this is no longer a do-gooder's dream, but a real possibility. Cities can work smarter for their residents, and indeed, they must.