Forewords

Geek Cities Get the Job Done
Michele Jolin, Managing Partner, Results for America

Today, geeks are driving our nation's competitiveness and the dynamism of the global economy, creating new solutions and technologies, and using their combination of creativity and focus on hard data to transform society. Geeks have moved out of the back rooms of research departments and laboratories to be recognized as the innovators and trendsetters they are. Increasingly, they are the ones holding corner offices, seizing new opportunities to innovate and connect, to create solutions and get results. That's why *The Economist* magazine notes that "no serious organization can prosper without them." Geeks have evolved, and they are transforming our world.

So too our nation's cities are evolving. A data and results revolution is taking place in local governments across the country. This *Geek Cities* report highlights for us the extent to which city governments have become the incubators of innovation and the drivers of results in America. These cities are leading the way by investing in building evidence, using data, and monitoring performance. They are comparing the level of evidence behind different programs, setting priorities, and allocating funding based on that evidence. They are breaking down silos and experimenting and inventing their way out of problems. By relying on hard data and evidence to drive funding decisions and set priorities, these trailblazing cities are improving outcomes, delivering results to their citizens, and proving that geek cities can get the job done.

This report offers critical rays of hope about the potential for all levels of government to get things done in America. While the headlines, especially from Washington, are often about gridlock and hyperpartisanship, these geek cities are demonstrating that real progress is possible if decisions are made using what we know about what works in communities.

At Results for America, our goal is to improve outcomes for young people, their families, and their communities by channeling public resources to solutions that use data and evidence to get better results. This *Geek Cities* report illustrates how innovative city leaders and their community and philanthropic partners are doing just that.

Why do these urban leaders care so much about data and evidence? Because they know that good intentions and conventional wisdom are not enough: that getting results in education, infant mortality, jobs, and other areas depends on figuring out what is working and what isn't, and then acting on that knowledge. Investing in what works can involve some very tough choices—and indeed some of these cities are demonstrating how government can use what it learns from

the data to defund programs that fail to achieve results. Just take a look at how these city leaders are advancing reforms:

- Baltimore completely upended its budgeting process to implement one that is outcomes-driven and focused on hard data. For instance, it is shifting resources towards evidence-based interventions to eliminate infant mortality.

- Denver embraced a data-driven approach to tracking and continuously improving its schools. And it is investing in an in-house "academy" to teach city employees how to innovate, measure performance, and continuously track their data and improve results.

- Miami revamped its education system by honing in on school performance data and regularly tracking that data on each child.

- New York City chose to invest in data—trying out new methods of serving critical populations, but carefully tracking the success rates of each method. New York then made the tough decisions to shift dollars away from programs that—according to evidence and data—were failing to get results, and towards programs with evidence of success.

- Providence brought together community leaders across the board for an evidence-driven, community-wide approach to helping children. Providence is also democratizing the data, making it accessible to the public.

- San Antonio used evidence to set city priorities and determine how best to invest limited public dollars in a way that would make the most difference for children and open up lifelong opportunities.

These geek cities are doing what we believe all cities should do: evaluate programs in order to understand what's working and what's not, and allocate precious funds to programs and practices that have the strongest evidence of positive, significant, and relevant impact.

And, the geek cities highlighted are doing what we believe the federal and state governments should be doing as well. While both President Bush and President Obama took critical steps to get the federal government to focus on performance and use evidence to make decisions—and Republican and Democratic governors across the country are beginning to make this a priority—more needs to be done. This will require a monumental shift in the *status quo*. The vast majority of policy-makers do not use rigorous evidence or credible, relevant data in making policy and funding decisions. Government dollars largely flow to those who have gotten funding in the past, regardless of impact.

But, these geek cities show that this shift is possible. In a time of tight government budgets at all levels, the examples of innovation and progress illustrated in this report can help move us beyond a sole focus on funding levels to a focus on how to get better results with existing resources. These cities have found creative and effective ways to use data and evidence to steer public dollars to address needs in their communities and get better results.

We Need More "Geek Cities"

Mayor Julián Castro, San Antonio, Texas

In May 2011, I assembled a committee of local business and education leaders—we called it the Brainpower Taskforce—to examine whether a targeted, significant financial investment could fundamentally improve San Antonio's educational trajectory and help us build a globally competitive workforce that is prepared to take on the jobs of the 21st century. After more than a year of studying best practices and evidence-based outcomes in other American cities, the taskforce recommended that we focus on high-quality pre-kindergarten for four-year-olds. Voters approved a 1/8-cent sales tax increase to help fund the effort, and in late August I had the privilege of greeting parents and kids outside one of our new Pre-K 4 SA education centers on the first day of school.

The kids I saw that rainy but hopeful morning told me they were ready to learn. We in San Antonio are ready to help them learn. We have picked only the pre-K curricula with the best evidence for successful outcomes, and we'll closely monitor results along the way. We'll use what we find out from that data to bolster what works and discontinue any programs that aren't measuring up.

I'm proud that Pre-K 4 SA is one of the innovative programs featured in this report because the evidence is clear: brainpower is the new currency of success in the 21st century global economy. The cities that cultivate it will thrive. The ones that don't will fall further behind. But what really excites me about this report is to see that San Antonio is far from alone.

As state and federal budgets continue to shrink, cities and regions are playing an increasingly essential role in boosting educational achievement. All across the country, cities are using data and evidence—the authors of this report have taken to calling us "geek cities"—to get better results for our residents. As you'll see, there are a lot of ways to do this: developing and evaluating your own programs, borrowing the best from across the country (as San Antonio has done), creating new budgeting and performance measurement systems, and much more. But whichever path we take, we all have the same goal in mind—getting beyond the rhetoric and ideology and really trying to understand what will achieve results in public education, preventing infant mortality, and other big social challenges. Knowing what gets results means we can invest our scarce public dollars in what works.

I hope every mayor in America reads this report and thinks about whether the ideas discussed here can be of benefit in his or her community. I also hope state and federal officials, nonprofit leaders, and philanthropists read it as well—because we can't do this work alone.

Cities like the ones featured in this report are innovating their way into the future, creating models that can be adapted across the nation. If smarter use of data and evidence to improve lives makes us geek cities, then all I can say is: Join us! Because what we need is more geek cities in every corner of the country.

Philanthropy Can Help Cities Develop Results-Focused Initiatives

Patrick T. McCarthy, President and CEO, Annie E. Casey Foundation

This is an exciting paper about what some might consider a geeky or even boring topic. But that would be to miss the story of a fundamental transformation that is underway. This transformation is changing the conversation in American cities from "what are we doing?" to "what difference are we making?" It is a pivotal shift that puts the focus where it should be, on investing scarce public resources as effectively as possible to achieve the greatest results for children, families, and communities. This is an agenda that leaders across the ideological spectrum can and are embracing, as this report confirms.

At the Annie E. Casey Foundation, we describe ourselves as results-focused and data-driven. We recognize kindred spirits throughout these pages. These leaders are bringing new rigor to the table and their constituents are the ultimate beneficiaries. From those that are disaggregating data and using it to pinpoint problems and track progress to those that are consulting the evidence base in making critical decisions, we are heartened by their efforts.

We are especially proud that Baltimore, our hometown, is at the forefront. CitiStat has moved from a boutique initiative to a frame of mind that has strengthened core processes of city government and given leaders a wealth of data to drive decisions. Baltimore also has shifted to outcomes-based budgeting starting with a fundamentally important step, identifying the outcomes the city seeks to impact. Applying this perspective to budget decisions directs more resources to the highest priority areas. And performance data helps distinguish programs that are effective.

As this report underscores, careful analysis of the right indicators can both illuminate important trends and galvanize action. New York City, which has inspired so many city leaders with its commitment to evidence and use of data, offers an excellent example in its work on chronic school absenteeism. They knew that average daily attendance, the conventional indicator, could mask students with patterns of chronic absenteeism, a significant risk factor for later school and behavioral problems. By disaggregating the data, the schools have been able to pinpoint problems and use real-time data to identify which interventions are most effective.

This paper also draws our attention to the importance of building and using evidence of what works in making smart decisions about investing public resources. Casey invests deeply in helping to build the evidence base and in helping decision makers to draw on it to inform their decisions. Our collaboration with leaders in Providence on Evidence2Success (E2S) is a good example. E2S aims to demonstrate that public systems, schools, and communities working together to guide public investment toward proven programs and services will have a big impact on children's healthy growth and development.

B'More for Healthy Babies (BHB), another terrific Baltimore example, is highlighted here for the strides it has made combatting a tragically high rate of infant mortality. Like many of the initiatives outlined in this report, BHB began with a "data walk." It has continued to delve deeply into data that illuminates not just the overall infant mortality rate but helps target efforts to individuals with the greatest need. Baltimore is taking this same smart approach as it implements a decision to shift all home visiting to evidence-based models. The city understands the importance of asking not only "does it work" but "for whom"? This approach allows the city to target effective but expensive interventions to the highest-risk families.

Taken together, the examples highlighted in these pages tell us a great deal about what municipal leaders can do and can achieve when they make greater use of evidence and more skillful use of data. But this is not government's role alone. Those of us in philanthropy have a key role to play here. Our investments in promising innovations should carry through to testing, refining, and evidence-building on those that appear to be the most effective. This paper notes the capacities—both human and technical—needed by public leaders. We should be prepared to help build them. One of those capacities is to be able to access and interpret information about the evidence base behind various program options.

I can think of no more hopeful trend occurring in our nation's cities than the efforts outlined in this paper. Decisions that are anchored in evidence and driven by data lead to smarter investments and, ultimately, to better outcomes for children, families, and communities. I encourage you to read and be inspired by these stories and the recommendations at the end of the report. Then share them with your colleagues.