The Path Forward

In conducting this research, we had the opportunity to speak with dozens of people in cities around the country at the forefront of using data and evidence to improve performance and outcomes. We are inspired by the number and capacity of these leaders and the volume and variety of innovations underway. We are also impressed by the cities, such as Providence and Baltimore, where a focus and evolving approach to use data and evidence has persisted despite changes in city leadership.

Propelled by the two trends we discussed at the outset of this paper—increased government attention to finding and funding what works and the use of technology to collect, understand, and act on data—these examples of innovation from around the nation allow us to envision a broader shift in which more and more cities find ways to use data and evidence more effectively to get better outcomes for their residents.

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 not a far-fetched dream, but a real possibility. Cities can work smarter for their residents, and indeed, they must.

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