

CASE
STUDY

Philadelphia Develops Citywide Evaluation Model to Increase the Use and Impact of City Programs and Services



THE CHALLENGE: The City of Philadelphia, like many American cities, grapples with how to make their programs and services as responsive as possible to residents' needs.

THE APPROACH: In April 2016, the Philadelphia Mayor's Office jointly created a collaborative team called the [Philadelphia Behavioral Science Initiative](#) with academic researchers. First, Philadelphia city staff identify enrollment and usage challenges within city programs and services. Then, the team connects department staff with suitable academic research partners to identify key service touch points and develop behavioral science-based evaluations. Finally, the evaluation findings help determine how to engage city residents in these programs and services more effectively and efficiently.

THE RESULTS: Philadelphia has completed five projects on city programs and services based on the latest behavioral science research. Preliminary results show that the Philadelphia Behavioral Science Initiative model and its focus on evaluations based on behavioral science research have improved the effectiveness and efficiency of city-funded programs and made them more responsive to residents' needs.

RESULTS
FOR AMERICA

January 5, 2018

INTRODUCTION

In April 2016, Philadelphia Mayor Jim Kenney launched the [Philadelphia Behavioral Science Initiative](#) within the Mayor's Office of Policy, Legislation, and Intergovernmental Affairs to make city programs and services more effective and efficient using evaluations based on the latest behavioral science research.

Behavioral science, which focuses on how people make judgments and decisions and how they interact with one another, draws on theory and methods from cognitive and social psychology, economics, and other related fields.¹

Anjali Chainani, the City of Philadelphia's Director of Policy and a Results for America Local Government Fellow, leads the Philadelphia Behavioral Science Initiative along with two staff members, six city department partners, six academic partner institutions including two academic leads at the University of Pennsylvania and Swarthmore College, and several other academic and government leaders and organizations.

The Philadelphia Behavioral Science Initiative team works with Philadelphia city agency leaders to identify enrollment and usage challenges within their programs and services.

“By taking steps to better analyze our engagement with the residents we serve and improve upon our approach to challenges, we’re creating effective data-informed outcomes.”

— JIM KENNEY
Mayor of Philadelphia

The team then connects department staff with suitable academic research partners to identify key service touch points and develop behavioral science-based evaluations to help determine how to engage city residents in these programs and services more effectively and efficiently.

The creation of this citywide initiative was inspired by a previously funded project called the City Accelerator led by the Mayor's Office of Policy Planning and Coordination under the previous Administration. The success of two experiments in 2015 and 2016 led to the establishment of this larger city initiative and the creation of a partnership model.

The Philadelphia Behavioral Science Initiative is one of several programs managed by [GovLabPHL](#), a multi-agency team focused on embedding evidence-based and data-driven practices in city programs and services through cross sector collaboration. GovLabPHL has three streams of work:

1. Creating learning opportunities for city employees;
2. Piloting program modifications and new prototypes; and
3. Ensuring the public has access to learn about new initiatives and best practices. GovLabPHL uses three evidence-based frameworks for all its work: behavioral science, human-centered design, and trauma-informed care.²

THE CHALLENGE

The City of Philadelphia, like many American cities, struggles with how to make their programs and services as responsive as possible to their residents' needs.

The Philadelphia Senior Citizen Water Bill Discount Program, for example, was created decades ago to provide financial assistance to seniors on a fixed budget, but it was not enrolling anywhere near the number of residents expected to apply for these benefits. City agency leaders were not sure why eligible residents were not taking full advantage of the benefits of this program and others like it. Was enrollment lower than expected because residents simply were not aware of the services provided by this program? Or was this program, and others like it, not addressing the actual needs of residents?

THE APPROACH

The Philadelphia Behavioral Science Initiative team works with Philadelphia city agency leaders to identify enrollment and usage challenges within their programs and services. The team then connects department staff with suitable academic research partners to identify key service touch points and develop behavioral science-based evaluations to help determine how to engage city residents in these programs and services more effectively and efficiently. In determining which academic researchers are best suited for any given project, the team evaluates factors including the academic researcher's subject-area expertise, interest in the public policy topic, and ability to work under the project timeline.

This centralized government-researcher partnership model can be scaled quickly across city programs because once the project has been reviewed and paired with an appropriate research partner, agency staff and academic researchers take the lead in conducting the evaluation and analysis.





THE APPROACH (CONTINUED)

For example, to answer the questions raised by the Philadelphia Senior Citizen Water Bill Discount Program in 2015, the Mayor's Office worked with leaders from the Philadelphia Department of Revenue, the Mayor's Office of Community Empowerment and Opportunity, and researchers at Columbia University to develop an evaluation with various types of messages and forms of outreach — including phone calls, postcards and different size envelopes — to determine whether these factors impact enrollment of low-income seniors in the discount program. Every intervention showed a positive statistically significant impact on program enrollment, with the largest effect resulting from large envelopes, showing a 9% bump in participation.

City of Philadelphia Academic Partners

Swarthmore College (Academic Lead)

The University of Pennsylvania (Academic Lead)

Columbia University

Drexel University

Princeton University

Yale University

Saint Joseph's University

Temple University

TIPS FOR REPLICATION

- **Champions are Essential:** Getting started can be the hardest part. That is why it is crucial to have champions in academia, among mayoral and city staff, as well as staff in the law department.
- **Conversations are Key:** It is important to have conversations with city departments about what behavioral science is and how it relates to their work.
- **Trust is Necessary:** Building trust between city employees and researchers is fundamental and takes time.
- **Exposure Encourages Engagement:** Departments become engaged when their colleagues have good experiences and exposure to the process.
- **Process Proves Positive:** Developing a common rubric, such as a key set of questions for all departments interested in a project, is helpful for streamlining information and collaboration.
- **Mistakes Happen:** Mistakes are going to be made, and it is part of the process. There may be differences between research design and program implementation. The important thing is to communicate when things do not go as planned.

THE RESULTS

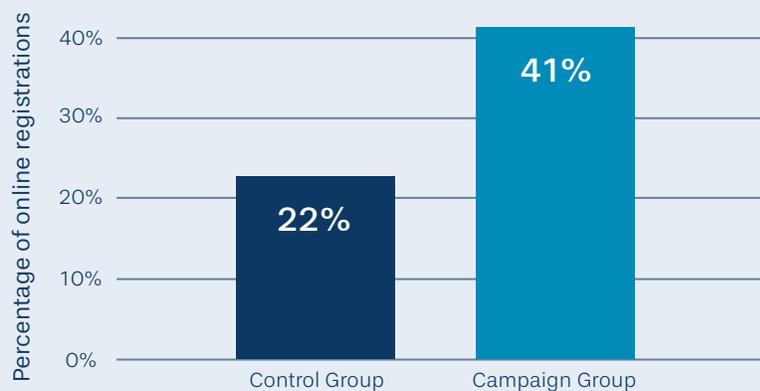
Philadelphia has completed five projects on city programs and services based on the latest behavioral science research and has achieved the following results to date:

Successes to Date

- **Department of Revenue & Senior Citizen Water Bill Discount Program** — After testing various messaging and methods of delivery, Philadelphia experienced a 9% increase in enrollment approvals in the Senior Citizen Water Bill Discount Program for seniors who were sent a letter in a large envelope as compared with the control group.
- **Department of Revenue & Delinquent Tax Payments** — After testing various messaging and envelope sizes to increase collection of overdue real estate tax payments, Philadelphia collected \$615,752 in revenue with an initial \$17,000 investment in the pilot project.
- **Office of Transportation and Infrastructure Systems & Philly Bike Share** — After testing a 15% or 50% discount for the first month for Indego Bike Share users, preliminary results show an increase in returning riders among both groups as compared with the control group, with the highest redemption rate being 3.5% among those offered a 50% discount.
- **Mayor's Taskforce on Litter Reduction and Zero Waste** — After evaluating litter conditions at city parks and developing an app to track litter across the city, Philadelphia was able to identify new challenges and insights such as bin availability issues and lack of public waste bins to assist in creating appropriate interventions to reduce litter and increase recycling.
- **Department of Licenses and Inspections & Online Licensing** — After testing various messages to increase the number of people using online license registration, preliminary findings demonstrate that individuals who received a straightforward deadline notification produced the highest response in getting license holders to register with the online system, with a 41% positive response rate, compared to 22% for the control group receiving no letter.

ONLINE REGISTRATION CAMPAIGN

(The Department of Licenses and Inspection)



The campaign achieved a 19% increase in the number of customers who used the online license renewal option, using a straightforward deadline notification.

SOURCE: PHILADELPHIA MAYOR'S OFFICE OF POLICY, LEGISLATION AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS, DECEMBER 2017

THE RESULTS (CONTINUED)

Since March 2017, Philadelphia has also begun evaluations of the following four city programs and services using the latest behavioral science research and is expecting to see results from them in the coming months:

- **Earned Income Tax Credit Program** — How can Philadelphia increase the take-up rate of eligible residents to apply for the federal EITC to improve economic well-being?
- **City Wellness Program** — How can Philadelphia increase the number of city employees and spouses who participate in the city wellness program to improve preventative health?
- **Youth Summer Jobs** — How can Philadelphia increase access and equity of youth summer jobs through targeted outreach to enhance youth development?

- **Philly Bike Share** — How can Philadelphia encourage low-income bike share passholders to continue to ride bikes throughout the winter months? How can Indego Bike Share encourage monthly passholders to switch to an annually-billed membership?

The Philadelphia Behavioral Science Initiative is a win-win for city government, academics, and most importantly, for residents.

- Researchers have the opportunity to work with city staff and use city data to develop real-world policy solutions.
- City departments receive rigorous data analysis on the impact of program changes to better serve city residents.
- Residents receive the benefits from city programs and services more effectively.



ABOUT RESULTS FOR AMERICA'S LOCAL GOVERNMENT FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

Results for America's Local Government Fellows program was founded in September 2014 to provide an advanced group of local government leaders in diverse and influential cities and counties across the country the knowledge and support to implement strategies that consistently use data and evidence to drive policy and budget decisions on major policy challenges.

With the support and guidance of Results for America, the Local Government Fellows lead their governments toward advanced stages of data-driven and evidence-based policymaking in order to address major policy challenges in their communities. The **16 cities** and counties represented in the Fellowship collectively

represent more than **28 million** people and **\$148 billion** in local government spending.

RFA engages its Local Government Fellows in:

- Defining short- and long-term policy goals;
- Developing research partnerships with academics;
- Sharing best practices and demonstration projects;
- Problem-solving among peers;
- Receiving individual feedback and coaching; and
- Participating in a national network and peer cohort.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Results for America would like to thank Philadelphia Mayor Jim Kenney for investing in the use of data and evidence to improve government services, as well as the Philadelphia Behavioral Science Initiative Core Team for their assistance in developing this case study:

- Aamia Malik, Summer Policy Fellow, Swarthmore College
- Anjali Chainani, Director of Policy, City of Philadelphia
- Benjamin Mishkin, Deputy City Solicitor, City of Philadelphia
- Charles Williamson, Summer Policy Fellow, Swarthmore College
- Dan Hopkins, Associate Professor, University of Pennsylvania (Academic Lead)
- Julia Pan, Fall Policy Fellow, University of Pennsylvania

- Nandi O'Connor, Policy Analyst, City of Philadelphia
- Syon Bhanot, Assistant Professor, Swarthmore College (Academic Lead)
- Yuan Huang, Assistant Director of Policy, City of Philadelphia

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Read more about Philadelphia's work from StateScoop's "[Philadelphia launches GovLabPHL to improve agency performance with behavioral science](#)" by Colin Wood (March 2, 2017)
- Read more about behavioral science from the Behavioral Insights Team's "[Behavioral insights for Cities](#)" (October 24, 2016)
- Learn more about Results for America's **Local Government Fellowship** at <http://results4america.org>

“ This [work] allows us to deliver on our main priority, which is to serve our residents the best we can. ”

— NANDI O'CONNOR
Policy Analyst, Mayor's Office
of Policy, Legislation and
Intergovernmental Affairs

AUTHORS

Maia Jachimowicz, Results for America's Vice President of Evidence-Based Policy Implementation, maia@results4america.org

Marilyn Headley, Results for America Program Intern and MPA Candidate, Lyndon B. Johnson School at UT Austin, marilyn@results4america.org

Sophie Bergmann, Results for America Program Associate, sophie@results4america.org

REFERENCES

1. "Behavioral Science." The University of Chicago Booth School of Business. Accessed June 20, 2017. <https://www.chicagobooth.edu/programs/phd/academics/dissertation-areas/behavioral-science>.
2. Philadelphia Mayor's Office of Policy, Legislation and Intergovernmental Affairs, December 2017.
3. The Department of Revenue's Senior Citizen Water Bill Discount Program and Delinquent Tax Payment projects were completed in 2015 through support from Living Cities and Citi Foundation's City Accelerator grant. These projects inspired the creation of the Philadelphia Behavioral Science Initiative and research findings continue to inform program operations.

PHOTOS

Cover Photo: Sourced in public domain from [Wallpapers 13](#).

Page 3: City of Philadelphia Flickr.

Page 4: City of Philadelphia Flickr.

Page 6: City of Philadelphia Flickr.

ABOUT THE INVEST IN WHAT WORKS POLICY SERIES

This report is part of Results for America's Invest in What Works Policy Series, which provides ideas and supporting research to policymakers to drive public funds toward evidence-based, results-driven solutions. Results for America is committed to improving outcomes for young people, their families, and communities by shifting public resources toward programs and practices that use evidence and data to improve quality and get better results.

**RESULTS
FOR AMERICA**

Invest in
What Works
Policy
Series

This case study has been produced with the generous support of the Laura and John Arnold Foundation. The case study is an independent work product of Results for America, and the views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the funder.