



CASE STUDY { **New York City's** Results-Driven Approach to Combating Poverty and Inequality

THE CHALLENGE: In 2014, Mayor Bill de Blasio entered office with inequality as the defining core of his agenda. Across the new administration, New York City agencies organized with this priority in mind. New York City's Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO), established under Mayor Mike Bloomberg in 2006 as the first municipal innovation lab in the United States, was initially charged with launching and evaluating new anti-poverty pilot programs to identify effective solutions; its mandate also included constructing superior methodologies for accurately measuring poverty. With an entire administration oriented to consider economic disparities, New York City now needed to consider how CEO could evolve.

THE APPROACH: Building from its founding mandate, CEO expanded in scope, added new capabilities, and initiated new methods for applying an evidence and equity lens to program and policy development, service delivery, and budget decisions. Under Mayor de Blasio, CEO merged with a separate mayoral unit, HHS-Connect, and was renamed the [Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity \(NYC Opportunity\)](#). NYC Opportunity now evaluates its own program models and signature citywide initiatives as well. It has shepherded the dramatic growth of effective program strategies. NYC Opportunity increasingly blends technology with programmatic interventions and outcome measurement. And it uses research in new ways to model implications of potential policies, surface disparities, and incorporate resident perspectives.

THE RESULTS: During the decade since its inception as two distinct units, NYC Opportunity has consistently pioneered new ways for the City to use data, evidence, and design. The findings from NYC Opportunity's work have led to targeted policy and program improvements in workforce, education, criminal justice, youth development, and asset development. NYC Opportunity has developed the [New York City Government \(NYCgov\) Poverty Measure](#) and has overseen a portfolio of more than 70 pilot projects and more than 110 evaluations, with an increasing focus on citywide initiatives. According to the most recent [NYCgov Poverty Measure report](#), by 2016 there were, 141,000 fewer people living in poverty or near poverty than in 2013, a statistically significant decline.¹



December 20, 2018

INTRODUCTION

In March 2006, then-New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg established the [Commission for Economic Opportunity](#), a group of 32 civic leaders from the business, nonprofit, and public sectors to find more effective ways to address poverty in New York City. Following the release of the Commission's [September 2006 report](#), then-NYC Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services and current Results for America Senior Fellow [Linda Gibbs](#) oversaw the creation of the Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO) – a government office within the Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services' Office – to implement the Commission's recommendations.

CEO was created to work across city agencies to identify and test innovative solutions to reduce poverty.² Throughout the remainder of the Bloomberg Administration, CEO developed, tested, scaled, and shuttered programs in keeping with the Commission's report recommendations to better use data and evidence toward the government's goal of alleviating poverty.

In 2014, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio took office. A central theme of his campaign had been the challenge of income inequality, and his new administration was animated by the mission of creating a more inclusive, fairer city. CEO became part of the Mayor's Office of Operations, the locus of internal accountability, project and performance management in the City. Within the Mayor's Office of Operations, CEO was well-positioned to support de Blasio's commitment to making equity a core governing principle, and to help ensure evidence and results would guide the City's range of efforts to address poverty and its related challenges.

Another unit moved to Operations by Mayor de Blasio was HHS-Connect (also created by then-Deputy Mayor Gibbs during her tenure). HHS-Connect had been established with the goal of

“Reducing poverty is a crucial part of our effort to make New York City fairer for everyone, and the Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity helps make sure we are using the best evidence in the work we do.”

— BILL DE BLASIO
Mayor of New York City



Mayor Bill de Blasio and Schools Chancellor Richard A. Carranza announce 3,257 families are receiving offers to free, full-day, high-quality 3-K for All across six community school districts – up from 793 offers across two community school districts last year.
Learning Through Play Pre-K Center, Bronx.
Wednesday, May 23, 2018.

using data and technology to support clients of the City's health and human services more holistically. Like CEO, HHS-Connect was formed to leverage data to improve the lives of low-income New York City residents.

INTRODUCTION (CONTINUED)

To take advantage of their common focus and complementary capabilities, the two units merged and in 2017 Mayor de Blasio announced the new [Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity \(NYC Opportunity\)](#). The newly merged Office now numbers about 65 staff, and provides research, program design and evaluation support, data integration services, digital products, and service design consulting to both individual city agencies and cross-agency initiatives.³ This effort is led by [Matthew Klein](#), Executive Director of the Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity and Results for America Local Government Fellow.

THE CHALLENGE

In 2014, Mayor Bill de Blasio entered office with inequality as the defining core of his agenda. Across the new administration, New York City agencies organized with this priority in mind. New York City's Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO), established under Mayor Mike Bloomberg in 2006 as the first municipal innovation lab in the United States, was initially charged with launching and evaluating new anti-poverty pilot programs to identify effective solutions; its mandate also included constructing superior methodologies for accurately measuring poverty. With an entire administration oriented to consider economic disparities, New York City now needed to consider how CEO could evolve.



Executive Director Matthew Klein in conversation with Mayor Bill de Blasio and Ford Foundation President Darren Walker at NYC Opportunity Mayoral Forum in May 2017.

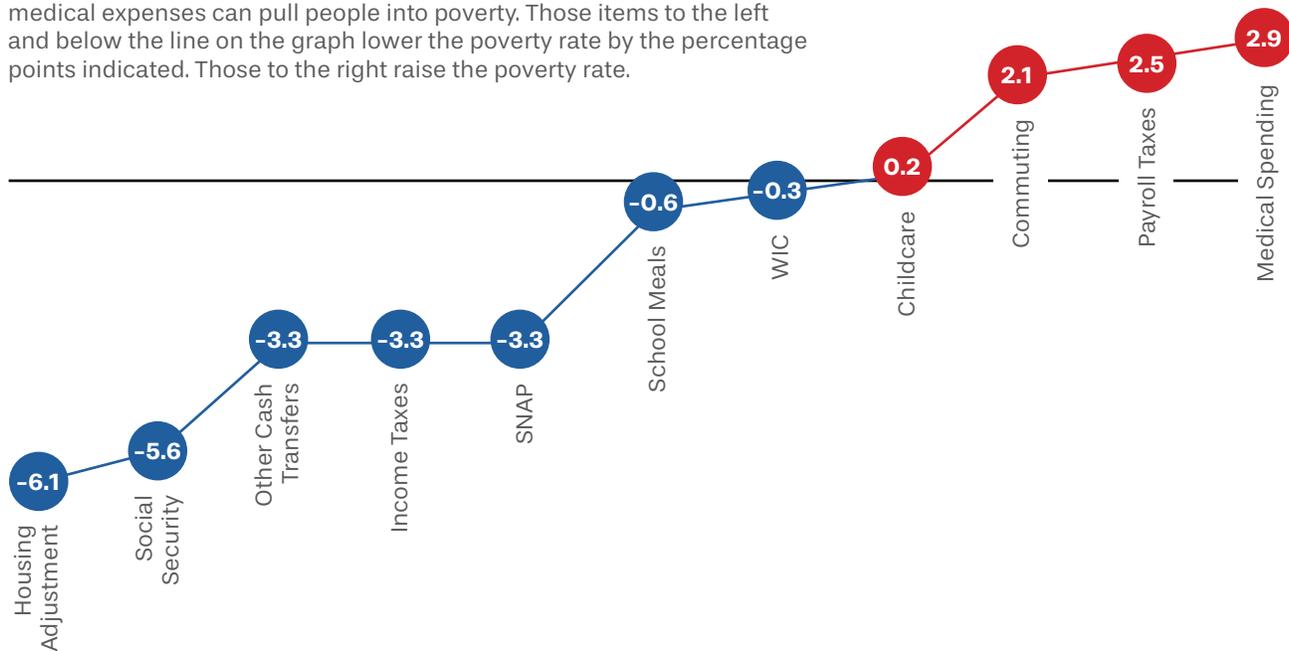
First Ever NYCgov Poverty Measure Helps the City Track Progress and Monitor Solutions

One key challenge New York City confronted early on was the need for better data and more consistent indicators among New York City government's anti-poverty initiatives. Through its partnership with multiple city agencies, in August 2008 the Center for Economic Opportunity first issued an alternative poverty measure for New York City, now known as the New York City Government Poverty Measure, or [NYCgov Poverty Measure](#). This innovative and alternative measure accounts for the higher cost of living in New York City and estimates the value of anti-poverty benefits in New York City on family income – all of which are not included in the federal poverty measure. The development of the NYCgov Poverty

Measure has gained nationwide recognition and contributed to the development of the first [Federal Supplemental Poverty Measure in 2011](#). Each year, NYC Opportunity releases an updated [poverty report](#) and uses the Poverty Measure to track New York City trends over time. The report measures specific policies' effects on New York City residents living in poverty, which helps inform public policy decisions across city government. The more specific Poverty Measure helps policymakers better understand the depth and scope of the problem within New York City, and guide informed decision making and program development.

Policy Affects Poverty

The NYCgov Poverty Measure allows the measurement of the extent to which anti-poverty programs and work-related tax credits can lift people over the poverty threshold. It can also measure how work-related and medical expenses can pull people into poverty. Those items to the left and below the line on the graph lower the poverty rate by the percentage points indicated. Those to the right raise the poverty rate.



SOURCE: NYCgov POVERTY MEASURE HIGHLIGHTS, 2018

THE APPROACH

NYC Opportunity takes a unique approach to reducing poverty and inequality in New York City. Rather than implement programs directly, it delivers its mission through close collaboration with city agencies by providing expertise in five specific areas:⁴

- 1. Research:** NYC Opportunity uses research to inform all aspects of its work. The Office's poverty research team produces an annual New York City official [poverty measure](#) which is used throughout city government. A robust body of poverty research is key to understanding the impact of the portfolio of programs NYC Opportunity tests and supports.
- 2. Program Design and Evaluation:** NYC Opportunity helps city agencies design and implement programs. The team helps agencies develop performance measures, while also providing program management and performance monitoring. The Office also contracts with [eight independent evaluation firms](#) to test the impact of pilot programs and city services.
- 3. Data Integration:** Facilitating cross-agency administrative data sharing and integration promotes a citywide approach to reducing poverty and inequality by reducing silos and improving coordination across city programs. NYC Opportunity is increasingly using technology to access and leverage big data to help the City better understand and target poverty and inequality, including through [Worker Connect](#), a data sharing technology that allows caseworkers to see real-time information about clients drawn from multiple city sources.

“ Our interdisciplinary team works across agencies helping New York City use the tools of evidence and innovation to address issues of poverty at scale. ”

— MATTHEW KLEIN
Executive Director,
NYC Mayor's Office
for Economic Opportunity

- 4. Digital Products:** NYC Opportunity develops and manages a portfolio of citywide digital products that help the City address poverty-related challenges. Some of these products, such as the [ACCESS NYC](#) tool, are designed to help residents more easily navigate city services, while others, such as [Growing Up NYC](#), help families identify age-appropriate programming and events for their children.
- 5. Service Design:** NYC Opportunity uses both a human-centered and evidence-based approach to make public services as effective and accessible as possible for New York City residents. [Civic Service Design](#) is a participatory approach that helps agencies understand services and policies through the eyes of residents, providers, and clients. The approach involves learning directly from users how they use and experience government services and includes resident perspectives in service design and implementation.⁵

TIPS FOR REPLICATION

- **Contract with Multiple Evaluation Firms:** Master contracts with multiple independent evaluation firms allow NYC Opportunity and agency partners to quickly procure and begin designing evaluations of city services. New York City programs differ in size, scope, and timelines. Working with multiple evaluation firms gives NYC Opportunity the flexibility to cater evaluations to each program's unique needs. By having master contracts with a pre-selected list of evaluation partners, NYC Opportunity also helps speed up the procurement of rigorous evaluations of city programs.

- **Commit to Defunding Projects That Do Not Work:** NYC Opportunity assesses the impact of demonstration projects and ongoing programs to identify areas for improvement. The office works closely with agency-led programs to make adjustments. If a program is funded directly through NYC Opportunity and fails to produce satisfactory results even after improvements are made, NYC Opportunity defunds the program and redirects funding toward more effective approaches. The commitment to ending ineffective programs is central to an innovative, results-driven approach.



New York City College of Technology students meet with their CUNY ASAP peers.

TIPS FOR REPLICATION (CONTINUED)

- **Establish Broad Authority to Help Develop Buy-in:** Being housed in the Mayor's Office lends NYC Opportunity the authority to engage with all government agencies and build credibility with agency leaders and City Hall staff. This credibility allows NYC Opportunity to facilitate cross-agency work on major city priorities and ensures their work is focused on the initiatives most aligned with the Mayor's citywide goals. It also allows individual agencies to pursue their own respective functions while sharing a common goal of poverty reduction.
- **Innovation Does Not Require Starting from Scratch:** City innovation offices and labs often emphasize starting new efforts, but with limited resources, it is critical to evaluate and build upon existing programs. NYC Opportunity helps city agencies modify current programs and services based on evidence-based practices, in addition to helping develop new initiatives. In doing so, NYC Opportunity helps embed a culture of continuous learning and improvement across city government.

THE RESULTS

Over the past decade, NYC Opportunity has managed a portfolio of more than 70 demonstration projects.

The Office has generated over 110 evaluations to determine how programs are being implemented and whether programs are achieving desired outcomes. In doing so, NYC Opportunity has contributed to the knowledge base of anti-poverty interventions that do and do not lift residents out of poverty.

NYC Opportunity has used the data from these evaluations to help bring multiple successful programs to scale. NYC Opportunity has accelerated expansion of effective poverty

alleviation and equity-driven approaches to reach more residents in need, including a public-housing based employment program called [Jobs-Plus](#) and a nationally recognized community college completion program called [City University of New York's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs](#). Both of these models have subsequently been replicated in other cities and states.

The findings from NYC Opportunity's evaluations have also led to targeted policy and program improvements in workforce, education, criminal justice, youth development, and asset development. For example, in the area of workforce development, two demonstration projects, [Sector Focused Career Centers](#), and [WorkAdvance](#), which paired employment and training with a sectorial approach were found to have a positive impact on wages. This finding informed New York City's investments in training for job-seekers as part of the City's overhaul of its workforce system.

In addition, after working closely with partner agencies to make adjustments and efforts to improve outcomes, NYC Opportunity has defunded several dozen programs, including those unable to produce satisfactory results or those no longer needed due to changing context. This process allows New York City agencies to use data and evidence to direct funding to the most effective programs, with the ultimate goal of providing low-income residents with the best possible services.

While challenges remain, New York City has made measurable progress in reducing poverty. The City is ahead of schedule in moving 800,000 people out of poverty or near poverty by 2025. According to NYC Opportunity's most recent NYCgov Poverty Measure report, there were 141,000 fewer residents living in poverty or near poverty in 2016 compared with 2013 data, and the percentage of people living in poverty in the City had fallen to 19.5%, the lowest rate since prior to the Great Recession.⁶

Specific Examples of NYC Opportunity Delivering Impact

Higher education and ensuring access to well-paying jobs are key strategies to address and prevent poverty. Two programs in these areas help illustrate NYC Opportunity's success implementing new program models, providing rigorous evaluation to measure impact, and bringing effective programs to scale:

- **City University of New York (CUNY) Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP)** launched in 2007 as a community college completion pilot to serve 1,000 students, with the support of NYC Opportunity. The program provides cohort-based support to low-income students attending community colleges, including financial assistance, personalized advising, tutoring, and career development services. One study found that CUNY ASAP nearly doubles graduation rates.⁷ Another study found that for each dollar invested in ASAP, there are \$3 to \$4 in returns due to tax revenues as well as a reduced need for public services.⁸ Based on these positive evaluation results, the City is expanding CUNY ASAP to serve 25,000 students by the 2018–2019 academic year, and MDRC and CUNY are leading a project to bring the ASAP model to three community colleges in Ohio.⁹
- The **Jobs-Plus** program provides on-site employment and training services to help public housing residents obtain jobs or advance their careers. Services include financial education, rent-based incentives, and community support that organizes neighbors to serve as a support network to overcome barriers to work. The program had already been rigorously evaluated in six other public housing authorities when NYC Opportunity launched the first two New York City-funded Jobs-Plus sites in 2009 and 2011. In 2011, NYC Opportunity partnered with the evaluation firm MDRC to conduct an implementation study to better understand program experiences and costs and build on existing evidence. New York City has since expanded the program to serve 27 of New York City's Housing Authority developments. MDRC found Jobs-Plus increases public housing residents' average earnings by 16% (over \$9,000) when fully implemented – and these findings persist over time.¹⁰

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 New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio for investing in the use of data and evidence to improve government services, as well as the [Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity](#) (NYC Opportunity) for their assistance in developing this case study:

- Carson Hicks, Deputy Executive Director, Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity (NYC Opportunity)
- Erin Kuller, Director of External Affairs, Mayor's Office of Operations
- Matthew Klein, Executive Director, Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity (NYC Opportunity); Senior Advisor for Service Innovation in the Mayor's Office of Operations
- Minden Koopmans, Assistant Director of Strategy and Operations, Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity (NYC Opportunity)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Discover more about the most recent results from NYC Opportunity by reading their 2017 Annual Report: <http://www1.nyc.gov/site/opportunity/reports/annual-reports.page>.
- Check out the programs, projects, and special initiatives currently underway at NYC Opportunity: <http://www1.nyc.gov/site/opportunity/portfolio/portfolio.page>.
- Learn more about CUNY ASAP by watching this video clip: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=2&v=flwtFAolN14.
- Learn more about Results for America's **Local Government Fellowship** at <http://results4america.org>.

AUTHORS

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

Marilyn Headley, Results for America Program Intern (former), info@results4america.org

Jennifer LaMotte, Results for America Program Intern (former), info@results4america.org

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

REFERENCES

1 & 6: "New York City Government Poverty Measure 2005–2016," Mayor's Office of Operations and NYC Opportunity, The City of New York, April 2018. https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/opportunity/pdf/18_poverty_measure_report.pdf.

2: Thomas Gais, Patricia Strach, Katie Zuber, Mike Fishman, and Asaph Glosser, "Poverty and Evidence-Based Governance: The New York City Center for Economic Opportunity", Rockefeller Report. Albany, NY: Rockefeller Institute of Government, 2014. https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/opportunity/pdf/CEO_2014.pdf.

3 & 4: "Equity, Evidence, & Innovation: Celebrating 10 Years of Results," 2017 Annual Report, Mayor's Office of Economic Opportunity. <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/opportunity/reports/annual-reports.page>.

5: DC Design, "What is Human-Centered Design?" Medium, August 14, 2017, <https://medium.com/dc-design/what-is-human-centered-design-6711c09e2779>.

7: "Findings at a Glance: CUNY ASAP Doubles Graduation Rates and Saves Taxpayer Dollars," NYC Center for Economic Opportunity. https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/opportunity/pdf/evidence/CUNY_ASAP_Findings_2017.pdf.

8: Henry M. Levin & Emma García, "Accelerating Community College Graduation Rates: A Benefit–Cost Analysis," The Journal of Higher Education 89, no.1 (2018): 1–27, DOI: 10.1080/00221546.2017.1313087.

9: "Equity, Evidence, & Innovation: Celebrating 10 Years of Results," 2017 Annual Report, Mayor's Office of Economic Opportunity. <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/opportunity/reports/annual-reports.page>; "Project Overview," Evaluation of Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) for Developmental Education Students, MDRC. <https://www.mdrc.org/project/evaluation-accelerated-study-associate-programs-asap-developmental-education-students#overview>.

10: "Jobs-Plus: Transforming Public Housing Developments into Places That Help Residents Find Work," Infographic, MDRC, August 2016. <https://www.mdrc.org/publication/jobs-plus-transforming-public-housing-developments-places-help-residents-find-work>.

PHOTOS

Cover Photo: Flickr Commons – Andreas Komodromos.

Page 2: Ed Reed/Mayoral Photography Office, New York City.

Page 3 & 6: Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity, New York City.

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.



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.