RESULTS FOR AMERICA

2021 Congressional Briefing:

How Local Governments Are Using Evidence and Data to Fight COVID-19, Get the Economy Back on Track and Support Kids in School

Highlighted Initiatives Background

The coronavirus pandemic has revealed and exacerbated problems that have pushed local governments, workforce agencies and schools beyond their existing capacity to respond, particularly for the most vulnerable people. Local governments have met this challenge by investing in high-impact, results-driven initiatives that advance economic mobility, help accelerate our economic recovery and support students struggling from COVID-related learning loss. But, local governments and their community partners can't do it alone. To make needed progress it will take federal, state and local governments working together with communities.

The following brief highlights three examples of local communities that are implementing evidence-based, locally driven efforts, such as emergency financial assistance, year-round Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) disbursement and high-dosage tutoring, to meet the challenges of this historic public health and economic crisis. The following three examples show how local governments and their community partners can leverage federal resources to enhance their efforts. These examples and those contained in Results for America's Economic Mobility Catalog, can help us reimagine how federal and local governments might work together to get our economy back to its full, equitable potential.

Providing Year-Round EITC Distribution to Increase Financial Stability

The Office of Community Wealth Building for the City of Rochester developed a year-round EITC program informed by behavioral science that provides a matching incentive to residents who save a portion of their EITC refund. The refund is paid out in quarterly installments throughout the year alongside a percentage match—thereby increasing savings and income stability. Enrollment in year-round EITC disbursement, has increased short-term savings and engagement with financial counseling and other opportunities for financial education, decreased financial stress, increased access to formal financial institutions (i.e. access to bank accounts), and decreased housing disruptions. Rochester's program builds on evidence of the importance of income stability and utilizes year-round EITC disbursement as a way to facilitate that income stability (thereby decreasing borrowing in the long term, lowering financial stress, and lowering the likelihood of missing bill payments).

If successful, year-round EITC disbursement is a strategy that is applicable across city contexts because it addresses issues like income and expense volatility and lack of access to banking institutions, which are prevalent across many cities. The Rochester project team is working with a range of city partners and using existing relationships to ensure that the intervention makes full use of the rich—yet currently siloed—existing service provider landscape.

Only 78 percent of eligible people around the country actually receive their EITC benefits. Therefore, if intended impact is verified, this savings approach could be a way to jumpstart savings and enhance economic mobility.

Finding What Works to Enhance Financial Security

The Wilson Sheehan Lab for Economic Opportunities (LEO) at the University of Notre Dame designs and implements research to help move people out of poverty. In particular, LEO helps local governments use resources effectively and drive real change by determining which programs work best and for whom.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic revealed underlying fragilities in economic security and weaknesses in our nation's safety net. To respond, LEO worked with 11 community partners and cities across the country to set up and test a variety of emergency financial assistance (EFA) programs. Each community took a slightly different approach to distributing this assistance and LEO has been assessing those differences so that it could help answer questions such as: what payment mechanism works best, how do targeted populations like veterans utilize EFA, how does EFA work as a part of a case management program, and, ultimately, what is the impact of EFA on outcomes such as housing, health, crime and financial security.

LEO's groundbreaking study on the Chicago Homelessness Prevention Call Center (HPCC)'s EFA program provided much of the foundation for the programs cities' established. That study identified the best targets for EFA programs (the lowest income recipients), how EFA impacts shelter entry (reduces it by 76% after 6 months), and the impact of EFA on crime (reduction in violent crimes). LEO is now studying EFA's impact on health, e.g., whether it decreases emergency department usage and hospitalizations.

The knowledge and evidence being built through the HPCC and other city EFA experiments will help local communities accelerate their recovery and drive lasting financial security for some of our most vulnerable populations.

High Dosage Tutoring to Combat Learning Loss

Guilford County Schools (GCS) in North Carolina has developed a comprehensive tutoring initiative designed to meet the needs of students who have fallen behind during school closure. Noting that more than 29% of high school students were failing one or more courses and that

learning loss in math far exceeded that in other subject areas, GCS focused its initial efforts on creating a tutoring corps that could provide direct support to high school students with multiple risk factors for not graduating.

Recruitment efforts for tutors began with North Carolina A&T State University, which graduates more engineers than any other HBCU in the nation. GCS allotted CARES Act funds specifically for graduate assistantships and paid university tutors to address unfinished learning in math. Recruitment efforts then extended to high school students meeting certain academic criteria to apply for math tutoring positions, paying by the hour and offering elective course credit.

Establishing a well trained tutoring corps to address learning loss is a critical component of academic acceleration and GCS plans to continue expanding tutoring efforts to hasten recovery from COVID–19.

Finding What Works for Your Local Community

Cities and their local community partners know they need more effective, equitable solutions to accelerate economic mobility. However, sometimes cities are not sure where to start or how to identify the best path forward. The Economic Mobility Catalog seeks to help local government leaders identify and implement evidence–based strategies to improve economic mobility. The Catalog provides an outcome framework, research syntheses across mobility outcomes, overviews of ~200 programs and strategies, and implementation–focused case studies in areas such as preschool expansion, internships and work readiness training for opportunity youth, college access and completion support, and transitional job programs.

To learn more about Results for America's federal policy program contact Kate Tromble, Results for America's Vice President for Federal Policy (kate@results4america.org).