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Forum on the Power of Federal Policy and Community Engagement to Improve Local Outcomes

Event hosted by the White House and Results for America brings together elected leaders and other policymakers focused on developing and implementing data-driven, evidence-based-solutions

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Event Background and Synopsis

A growing number of state and local governments are working aggressively to improve outcomes using evidence and data with crucial support from the federal government. For state and local leaders looking to address long-standing challenges and deliver equitable outcomes, federal policy and funding focused on evidence of effectiveness is essential, helping to catalyze change and make effective investments. Around the country, governments are strengthening their capacity to solve problems using data, evidence, and community engagement by leveraging incentives and guidance provided through the American Rescue Plan (ARP) and other recent federal laws, including the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), also known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

Those were the key takeaways from the August 1, 2022 White House [Evidence Forum](#) hosted by Results for America, the White House Office of Science and Technology (OSTP), and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). As part of the White House's [Year of Evidence for Action](#) launched in April, the event brought together local, state, and federal leaders for a panel discussion, and a workshop on community engagement best practices, engaging more than 200 participants.

The event comprised two parts, a panel and a workshop, with the first focusing on how federal evidence-based policy can improve local outcomes by leveraging [key ARPA provisions](#), community engagement, and racial equity. Participants in the bipartisan panel included Cook County Board of Commissioner President Toni Preckwinkle, Tulsa Mayor G.T. Bynum, San Jose Mayor Sam Liccardo, and King County Executive Dow Constantine. Federal leaders included Dr. Robert Hampshire, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Research and Technology and Chief Science Officer at the U.S. Department of Transportation and Julie Chávez Rodríguez, Director of the White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs. They discussed the importance of investing in evidence-based solutions to address inequities, as well as performance management and evaluation infrastructure.

After the panel, a workshop followed to assist local leaders with building community engagement into their ARP plans using the [federal guidance](#) for State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF) program as well as [guidance](#) for the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). Workshop participants and panelists highlighted the importance of community engagement as a critical part to use federal funding for lasting change.

Key Insights

Panel Overview: The Power of Evidence-Based Policy to Improve Local Outcomes

During the panel, leaders stressed two key points about unique opportunities relative to historic levels of federal aid now flowing to state and local governments.

- a) **Local and state leaders should leverage federal dollars to build and strengthen their data and evidence infrastructure to be able to develop and implement data-driven, evidence-based solutions.**
 - Michele Jolin, CEO and CO-Founder of Results for America, noted that state and local governments can use funding to build long-term capacity. She added that, “Recent federal legislation signals a clear and growing focus in Washington D.C. on testing, learning and constantly improving,” and added that, “governments can use funds for building long-term capacity to use evidence and data to become better problem solvers.”
 - Dr. Robert Hampshire of the U.S. Department of Transportation agreed, noting that federal ARP and IIJA grant recipients [can use funds for costs](#)

[related to performance management and program evaluation](#), such as supporting new and existing personnel and purchasing equipment for data analysis and performance evaluation. “Both direct and indirect costs are supported,” he said. “With this kind of explicit support for evidence and evaluation work, we can feel empowered to prioritize these.”

b) Local and state leaders should invest in data-driven, evidence-based solutions that address long-standing inequities exacerbated by the pandemic, then measure results.

- Homelessness, for example, has long been a challenge in San Jose, California, where high construction costs and demand have contributed to an affordability crisis. After analyzing data to understand the scale of the problem, the San Jose city government was able to identify the most impactful solution: prefabricated modular housing. “What we learned through the pandemic...was that we could move more people off the streets and into dignified housing if we could use...what we call ‘quick build apartments,’” Mayor Sam Liccardo said. “We used our ARP funding—about \$63 million between the city's allocation and what the state had granted to us—to really scale the solution.”
- In King County, Washington, which includes Seattle, the county government analyzed evidence-based best practices from several U.S. cities before launching their [Regional Peacekeepers Collective](#) that treats gun violence as a preventable public-health crisis. “We’re grateful for the opportunity, and grateful as well for the chance to measure our results [using] the ARP dollars,” said King County Executive Dow Constantine.
- Tulsa Mayor G.T. Bynum noted that his city government used ARP funds to implement municipal court reforms based on data demonstrating the value of equity-focused results. [Improvement efforts](#) include establishing a night court, allowing online fine payments, and expanding social services for individuals struggling with substance abuse, homelessness, and mental health issues. Mayor Bynum noted that “88% of the people who come out of our special services docket saw improvements in their self-sufficiency measures.” Bynum stressed that such efforts “... actually save the city money—\$780,000 a year—and deliver better results than what it costs to put somebody in jail.”
- Cook County President Toni Preckwinkle emphasized the need to engage community residents to be able to truly understand how to address racial

inequities. “We spent almost a year putting together the [ARP] plan,” Preckwinkle said, “casting the net as widely as we possibly could...and we've moved forward on a number of initiatives.” The county’s plan ended up focusing on three major areas: behavioral health, guaranteed income, and medical debt.

Workshop Overview: How to Effectively Integrate Stakeholder Engagement in Developing Data-Driven Programs

A [workshop](#) followed the panel and provided participants with a [community engagement framework](#) to increase the chances that federal aid reflects community priorities.

Workshop participants explored the framework, which contains four parts with key questions leaders can engage with teams and community members:

- a) **Identify the goals and purpose of community engagement.**
 - How will engagement help—how will it support specific goals and decisions?
 - What is the priority area for federal (ARP/IIJA) funding you want to pursue?
- b) **Assess the current relationship between your local government and the community**
 - Where do you most often land on the community engagement spectrum (which ranges from “not engaging” to “shifting power”)?
 - Where are trust deficits most pronounced?
- c) **Develop appropriate targeted engagement tactics: Listen to understand the need**
 - What kind of data would be most valuable?
 - Whose perspective do you need, and which perspectives have been historically marginalized or difficult to capture?
 - How will you know when outreach efforts result in an accurate reflection of the relevant communities?
- d) **Design and implement the engagement plan**
 - Are you consulting?
 - Are you involving?
 - Are you collaborating?
 - What tactics will you use in your plan?

Additional Resources on Creating Evidence-Based Programs

Results for America closely monitors how governments are leveraging federal dollars and guidance and also provides technical assistance to increase the likelihood that communities invest in programs that address inequities. Building off the Evidence Forum, additional resources to assist state and local government leaders include:

- Agencywide evaluation resources, Office of Management and Budget
 - [Evaluation.gov](#) compiles evaluation efforts, plans, and activities across all agencies.
- Guidance on Evidence-Based Policymaking, Office of Management and Budget, which guides agencies to use evidence that is informed by diverse perspectives and includes a definition of evidence that includes policy analysis, program evaluation, fact finding, and performance measurement
 - [*Phase I Implementation of Implementation of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018: Learning Agendas, Personnel, and Planning Guidance*](#)
 - [Evidence-Based Policymaking: Learning Agendas and Annual Evaluation Plans](#)
- [ARP Data and Evidence Dashboard](#), Results for America
 - Tracks how state and local governments are leveraging SLFRF program dollars.
- [Local Infrastructure Hub](#), US Conference of Mayors, National League of Cities, Results for America, Delivery Associates
 - In collaboration with Bloomberg Philanthropies, U.S. Conference of Mayors and the National League of Cities, among others—connects cities and towns with the expertise and resources they need to access federal IIJA funds, and then improve communities. As part of this project, Results for America will monitor how agency NOFOs are leveraging the Summary of White House Office of Management and Budget Guidance on IIJA (M-21-12).
- [Economic Mobility Catalog](#), Results for America
 - A clearinghouse of evidence-based policies, programs, and strategies across issue areas that state and local governments can invest in to advance economic mobility and racial equity