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Pew-MacArthur Results First Initiative

Advancing the use of innovative, evidence-based policymaking to drive government investments in proven policies and programs

The decisions that state and local governments make today about how to invest their limited resources will dramatically shape our nation's future. The Pew-MacArthur Results First Initiative, a project of The Pew Charitable Trusts and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, works with states and localities to develop the tools policymakers need to identify and fund effective programs that yield high returns on investment. Using innovative and customizable methods, Results First partners learn to:

- **Create an inventory of currently funded programs.**
- **Review which programs work.**
- **Conduct benefit-cost analysis to compare programs' likely return on investment.**
- **Use evidence to inform spending and policy decisions.**

Taken together, these efforts have helped leaders improve public outcomes, reduce costs, and increase accountability by ensuring that resources are directed toward effective, cost-beneficial approaches.

Four steps in the Results First process

1. **Create an inventory of currently funded programs.** A comprehensive program list enables policymakers to identify wasteful spending and support approaches that produce tangible results. Results First partners begin their work by developing a detailed program inventory that includes information on design, costs, capacity, and populations served.

“A state like Mississippi will always have needs that outpace our available resources, and having data to accurately predict what we can get out of our finite resources makes a tremendous difference. Results First has allowed us to take a step back, evaluate the programs that we are funding in a particular policy area, and then see if those programs are actually evidence-based.”

Mississippi state Representative **Toby Barker** (R-District 102)

2. **Review which programs work.** Rigorous research studies have tested the effectiveness of many public programs and identified those that are most likely to generate results. In order to expand the use of these evidence-based approaches, partners use information gleaned from their program inventory and from national evaluations to categorize how well programs achieve their desired outcomes. The Results First Clearinghouse Database, an online collection of information from eight national clearinghouses that conduct independent, transparent, systematic, and rigorous reviews of available research, helps state and local partners quickly review available research and assess the rated effectiveness of their programs.
3. **Conduct benefit-cost analysis to compare programs' likely return on investment.** Information on how the cost of a new opportunity compares with its short- and long-term effects is critically important in any major budget or policy decision, yet these data are often in short supply. Thanks to intensive technical assistance, Results First partners collect cost information on their programs and services to customize a benefit-cost model that estimates a return on investment for each assessed program. The Washington State Institute for Public Policy developed this model, which includes modules on criminal and juvenile justice, pre-K through 12th-grade education, child welfare, mental health, substance abuse, and public health.

“The beauty of the Results First approach is that it is very open and transparent. Everything that we fund must meet a high standard, and providers receive the tools they need to meet that standard. There are no surprises.”

Executive Deputy Commissioner **Michael C. Green**, New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services

4. **Use evidence to inform spending and policy decisions.** Information gleaned from the previous steps enables governments to make more informed policy and budget decisions, such as reducing or eliminating programs that are shown to produce poor outcomes or that lack sufficient evidence of effectiveness, and shifting funds to alternatives that can achieve better outcomes. Results First staff members help partner states and counties interpret results and develop reports and briefs that explain findings to policymakers.

Results First Helps New Mexico Make Evidence-Based Choices

Since partnering with the Results First Initiative in September 2011, New Mexico has become a leader in using sophisticated benefit-cost analysis to inform policy and budget decisions. Building on the state's strong history of investing in evidence-based programs and measuring their performance, the Results First approach has enabled state policymakers to get a clearer picture of the comparative value of potential taxpayer investments and to direct resources to the most effective programs. "The only way to really [know] if you're getting the value of your resources is to gather information, assess it, and try to determine the outcomes," says state Representative Luciano "Lucky" Varela (D-District 48). "I think the evidence-based approach will give us the information we need to fund the programs that work."

Results First: An approach that works

Since 2011, the Results First Initiative has partnered with states and counties across the country to create tools that help guide investments in proven policies and programs. The Results First approach has helped our partners:

- Systematically analyze data and make decisions based on evidence, rather than anecdote.
- Target funding to evidence-based programs and develop alternatives to ineffective options.
- Transcend partisan gridlock in enacting effective responses to major challenges and opportunities.
- Secure outside funding to support effective interventions.
- Enact legislation to enable evidence-based policymaking.
- Monitor programs' fidelity to their original design and their performance against set targets.

“ You never have enough resources to do everything you wish you could. We can make better choices for our community when we use empirical information rather than gut instinct.”

Chief Administrative Officer **Susan Mauriello**, Santa Cruz County, California

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The Pew Charitable Trusts is driven by the power of knowledge to solve today's most challenging problems. Pew applies a rigorous, analytical approach to improve public policy, inform the public and invigorate civic life.

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The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation supports creative people and effective institutions committed to building a more just, verdant, and peaceful world. In addition to selecting the MacArthur Fellows, the Foundation works to defend human rights, advance global conservation and security, make cities better places, and understand how technology is affecting children and society.



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Results First in Your State

The Pew-MacArthur Results First Initiative, a project of The Pew Charitable Trusts and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, works with states to implement an innovative cost-benefit analysis approach that helps them invest in policies and programs that are proven to work.

This model was initially developed by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy. State policymakers in Washington have used this approach for more than 15 years to craft sound budget and policy choices. The model can be used to assess programs in key state policy areas, currently including adult criminal and juvenile justice, child welfare, education, mental health, and substance abuse. The model will be expanded to assess programs in additional policy areas over time.

Since 2011, more than 14 states have worked with Results First to adopt the model and begin applying this rigorous analysis to their policy and budget decisions. More states will join the initiative in the coming months.

How States Can Participate

States are selected for participation in Results First based on several factors. One is a commitment to making evidence-based policy decisions. Another is the ability to provide the data needed to operate the cost-benefit analysis model. A third is a willingness to dedicate resources to the effort, including staff with data, statistical-analysis, and fiscal-analysis skills.

To determine whether a state is prepared to join the Pew-MacArthur Results First Initiative, our staff holds several conference calls with state representatives to discuss the model and the implementation process. Then, Results First staff conduct an initial site visit to assess the state's preparedness to participate in the initiative, meet with stakeholders, explore analytical and data capabilities, identify the level and nature of technical assistance to be provided, and discuss goals.

The Role of Results First Staff

Once a state has joined the Results First Initiative, Results First staff will:

Provide the cost-benefit analysis model to the state and supply periodic updates that incorporate new research and enhancements identified through our work in participating states.

Provide orientations to state policymakers and staff to explain the approach to cost-benefit analysis and how the model can help inform policy and budget deliberations.

Help the state establish policy and staff work groups that guide and implement the model. The policy work group typically includes executive, legislative, and/or judicial officials who will consider the model's results when making policy decisions.

Help the staff work group implement the model. This assistance includes periodic site visits by Results First staff and its technical assistance contractors as well as regular communication via virtual meetings, conference calls and email. The Results First team supplies extensive assistance during the implementation period (typically six to 12 months) as well as ongoing support to help the state customize the model and use the results to inform policy and budget deliberations. Major areas of this technical assistance include:

- Developing implementation plans and schedules.
- Tailoring the model by adding state-specific information for all data elements and/or studies to the model's summary of national research.
- Identifying data sources and analyzing program and fiscal data.
- Assisting the state in running the model and interpreting the results.

Help generate and advance reform options as requested by the state. The model enables states to explore a wide range of topics, but policymakers must identify the specific questions they wish to analyze. Results First staff can help states identify these policy questions and use the model to identify and evaluate solutions.

Share lessons learned among participating states. Results First periodically convenes meetings of participating states to promote information sharing and identify ways to further strengthen the cost-benefit analysis model. Results First staff also regularly compiles case studies highlighting progress in states.

The Role of Partner States

Submit a formal letter of commitment signed by state policy leaders, ideally from both the executive and legislative branches, to demonstrate commitment to implementing the cost-benefit model and considering the results in policy deliberations.

Once a state has joined the Results First Initiative, state staff will:

Appoint a policy work group to oversee state efforts, identify questions for analysis, and use the results to help shape state policy and budget decisions.

Establish a staff work group to manage the implementation process. The staff work group should:

- Be viewed as an honest broker so that stakeholders have confidence in the process and its results.
- Have access to the data needed to run the model.
- Possess the technical skills needed to operate the model.
- Designate a project manager to lead the effort.
- Make the project a clear priority for all those involved.
- Have regular meetings with key stakeholders to report progress, raise implementation issues and discuss results.

Develop an implementation plan. With guidance from Results First and in coordination with the policy and staff work groups, the project manager will develop a detailed implementation plan that:

- Identifies key steps.
- Identifies sources for required program and fiscal data.
- Designates staff to analyze the data.
- Establishes a timeline.
- Identifies key issues (e.g., data limitations) that will need to be addressed throughout the process.
- Specifies how and when status reports and results will be reported.

Collect and analyze the state-specific data necessary to implement the cost-benefit model.

Commit staff resources to implement the model and analyze findings, with support from Results First staff and contractors.

Collaborate with Results First to strengthen the model and build a learning community of states. This includes helping to compile lessons-learned reports and sharing information with other participating states.

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