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Achieving Success With the Pew-MacArthur Results First Initiative

A State Progress Report 2011-13

Overview

Fourteen states and three California counties have partnered with the Pew-MacArthur Results First Initiative, a joint project of The Pew Charitable Trusts and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, to apply a customized, innovative cost-benefit approach to policy and budget choices.¹

These jurisdictions are still in the early stages of implementing the Results First cost-benefit analysis model and using it to inform their decisions. In 2013, six states—Connecticut, Iowa, Massachusetts, New Mexico, New York, and Vermont—completed implementation of the Results First analytic model, which typically takes one year, and provided results to legislators and key stakeholders through testimony, presentations, and written reports. At least two others—Illinois and Santa Barbara County, CA—anticipate completion in time to support their 2014 policy processes. The remaining jurisdictions will complete implementation later in 2014 and plan to use the results to inform their 2015 legislative sessions.



The six states that have deployed their Results First models have already seen important policymaking successes, including:

- Shifting, cutting, or allocating a total of \$38 million in funding, with anticipated returns of as much as \$38 for every \$1 invested over the next seven to 10 years.
- Using the model to analyze proposed criminal justice policies.
- Passing legislation that incorporates the Results First approach into state policy and budget processes as a matter of law.

This brief highlights individual successes and identifies opportunities for states and counties to expand efforts to improve outcomes across a range of policy areas, including adult criminal and juvenile justice, child welfare, education, mental health, and substance abuse.

How states participate in Results First

States that wish to begin using cost-benefit analysis to improve their policymaking contact Results First and issue a formal partnership invitation. With support from Results First staff, these states then customize the analytic model using their own program and costs data. This implementation process typically takes one year, but once it is complete, states have the tools they need to compare the effectiveness of programs and to use the findings to drive budget decisions.

These analyses can include existing and proposed state programs and provide a clear ranking of each policy option's probable return on investment. Then, with technical assistance from Results First staff, states report the cost-benefit findings to policymakers in a timely manner and in an accessible, easy-to-understand format to inform budget debate and decision-making and improve the returns on taxpayer investments.

States' successes using Results First

Although states are still in the early stages of their implementation processes, several achieved significant successes in 2013—particularly in directing funds to evidence-based programs, analyzing programs and policy proposals, and establishing legislative frameworks for using the Results First approach in policymaking. These efforts demonstrate their commitment to making policy and budget decisions based on evidence of cost-effectiveness.

Directing funds in the budget process—The Results First approach enables states to spend their money more wisely and achieve higher returns on their investments. For example:

- **Iowa** launched its Results First model in 2013, and the initial reports prompted state lawmakers to allocate \$250,000 in new funding to support vocational education programs in prisons after the analysis showed that they would reduce recidivism and result in increased returns of approximately \$1 million in benefits over 10 years.

The model also demonstrated that the state's existing community-based domestic violence treatment program, which cost \$1 million annually, was ineffective in reducing recidivism among abusers and was losing \$3 for every dollar invested.² In response, the state partnered with the University of Iowa to pilot an alternative program known as Achieving Change Through Value-Based Behavior, commonly known as ACTV, with the goals of increasing public safety, improving outcomes, and spending money more responsibly. Formal evaluation findings are forthcoming, but early ACTV results suggest positive outcomes.
- In **Massachusetts**, preliminary analyses using the cost-benefit model helped policymakers recognize the power of the Results First approach to strengthen public safety by identifying the best investment of limited taxpayer dollars, according to Mike Coelho, assistant secretary of the Executive Office of Public Safety and Security, who is leading the state's Results First initiative. Consequently, Massachusetts has committed to spending approximately \$5 million of its Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant funds on highly effective programs.
- Decision-makers in **New Mexico** have used the Results First model to direct \$17.15 million to effective programs that are expected to generate approximately \$55 million in returns over seven years.³ New Mexico's Legislative Finance Committee, which houses the model, worked with the state's Sentencing Commission, Corrections Department, and Children, Youth and Families Department to produce reports that evaluated adult criminal justice, child welfare, and early education program cost and benefits and ranked the programs using a *Consumer Reports*-style list.

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These reports included analyses of the additional costs that New Mexico will incur if it continues to fund the same mix of programs without considering effectiveness or alternatives that offer improved outcomes and higher returns. For example, the 2012 report estimated that if current trends held, offenders released in fiscal year 2011 would cost taxpayers an estimated \$360 million in corrections funds alone due to reincarceration over the next 15 years.⁴

- **New York** Governor Andrew Cuomo directed \$15 million for Alternative to Incarceration Programs.⁵ From these funds, \$5 million were allocated through a competitive grant program, and the state's Results First cost-benefit work contributed to the selection process. The state will perform ongoing evaluations of programs receiving the funding to ensure that taxpayer dollars are spent effectively and produce the maximum public safety return.⁶
- The **Vermont** fiscal 2014 budget reduced funding for the state's correctional high school graduation program, Community High School of Vermont, by \$600,000, after an issue brief highlighting findings from the Vermont Results First model showed that the program was not running at full capacity and had a high per-student cost.⁷ The state plans to produce similar issue briefs to help inform policy and budget decisions, including reviews of electronic monitoring programs.

Analyzing the costs and benefits of legislative proposals outside the budget process has helped states understand their long-term

fiscal impact. Two states used their Results First models to analyze the potential effects of sentencing policy options and to inform key stakeholders:

- **Illinois'** Sentencing Policy Advisory Council used the Results First approach to assess the fiscal impact of 2013 proposed legislation that would have increased sentences for offenses involving the unlawful use of a weapon.⁸ The analysis indicated that the proposed change would result in significant costs for the state.
- In 2012, **Iowa's** Public Safety Advisory Board assessed mandatory minimums for drug traffickers and found high costs with no evidence of significant reductions in recidivism. The report also found that the state would reduce the prison population and save taxpayers \$1.2 million over 10 years if policymakers eliminated mandatory minimum terms for lower-risk drug offenders and reinvested a portion of the projected savings in evidence-based treatment programs. The advisory board recommended that validated risk assessment become a standard part of presentence reports to the courts.



Making Results First an integral part of state government is an important step toward building long-term support and establishing a strong foundation for the use of evidence in policy and budget decision-making. Three states passed legislation to create a sustained structure for Results First:

- In 2013, the **Connecticut** Legislature established the Results First Policy Oversight Committee to implement the model with a goal of supporting cost-effective policies and programming in the state. The committee is required to submit annual reports to the governor and General Assembly that recommend measures to implement the Results First model.⁹
- The **Massachusetts** Legislature set up the Special Commission on Criminal Justice in 2011 to implement the Results First model and help advance a variety of reforms.¹⁰ A law passed in 2013 made the commission permanent and directed it to use the Results First approach to develop legislation that would decrease corrections spending and use the savings to reduce crime, improve public safety, and address other budget priorities.¹¹
- In 2013, the **Vermont** Legislature passed Act 61, which created a Criminal Justice Consensus Cost-Benefit Working Group to develop the Vermont Results First model.¹² The group is required to use the model to deliver cost-benefit information that will enable policymakers to evaluate strategies and programs and identify options that achieve net social benefit.

By implementing and expanding the model, policymakers will be better able to allocate funds effectively across policy areas and achieve higher returns on their investments, improving their states' fiscal health and enhancing outcomes for citizens.

Opportunities to expand evidence-based policymaking

States have made substantial progress over the past 2½ years in implementing the Results First model and using it to inform and strengthen policy and budget decisions. These efforts have yielded millions of dollars in targeted funding, cost savings, and cost avoidance that will improve long-term outcomes for citizens. But significant opportunities remain to increase the use of cost-benefit analysis to inform critical budget and policy decisions. Specifically, states can:

- **Expand their analyses to identify and assess all funded programs in targeted policy areas.** To date, the states and counties participating in Results First have focused their work on a subset of programs that are included in the cost-benefit analysis model. States can expand their analyses to include all currently funded programs in the policy areas they are assessing, using the Results First approach to determine which programs are successful and which lack rigorous evidence of effectiveness, and to consider where they could make adjustments to align them to or replace them with evidence-based programs.
- **Implement the Results First model in a broader array of policy areas** such as child welfare, pre-k-12 education, substance abuse, and mental health. Although most states' initial models have addressed adult criminal and juvenile justice policy, states such as New Mexico have begun to tailor their models to also examine the child welfare and education arenas.
- **Ensure that programs are implemented with fidelity** to their research-based designs to safeguard effectiveness and maximize predicted outcomes. States can evaluate what systems are in place for reviewing and monitoring for fidelity and consider which programs may need improved oversight.

Conclusion

States are achieving success in using the Results First approach to make more informed budget and policy decisions through the power of evidence. By implementing and expanding the model, policymakers will be better able to allocate funds effectively across policy areas and achieve higher returns on their investments, improving their states' fiscal health and enhancing outcomes for citizens. Results First will continue to work with states to transform the way they make their policy and budget choices. This assistance includes helping states to expand their cost-benefit models to other critical policy areas and increasing participation in Results First across the country.

Endnotes

- 1 The 14 states and three California counties are Connecticut, Florida, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Texas, Vermont, Fresno County, Santa Barbara County, and Santa Cruz County.
- 2 Iowa Department of Corrections, "Return on Investment: Evidence-Based Options to Improve Outcomes" (May 2012), http://www.doc.state.ia.us/Research/DOC_HandoutROI_OffenderPrograms.pdf.
- 3 New Mexico Legislative Finance Committee, "Evidence-Based Programs to Reduce Recidivism and Improve Public Safety in Adult Corrections" (July 2013), <http://www.nmlegis.gov/lcs/handouts/CCJ%20072213%20Item%201%20LFC%20Results%20First%20Brief.pdf>.
- 4 New Mexico Legislative Finance Committee, "Reducing Recidivism, Cutting Costs and Improving Public Safety in the Incarceration and Supervision of Adult Offenders" June 14, 2012, <http://www.nmlegis.gov/lcs/handouts/BHS%20101812%20NM%20Corrections%20Department%20LFC%20Program%20Evaluation.pdf>.
- 5 Governor Andrew M. Cuomo, "Building on Success," New York 2014 State of the State, Jan. 8, 2014, 177, <http://www.governor.ny.gov/assets/documents/2014-SOS-Book.pdf>.
- 6 New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services, "Request for Proposals, Alternatives to Incarceration" (2013) 1, <http://www.criminaljustice.ny.gov/ofpa/pdfdocs/ATI-RFP-Due-Sep-16-2013.pdf>.
- 7 Vermont Legislative Joint Fiscal Office, "Community High School of Vermont" (March 1, 2013), http://www.leg.state.vt.us/jfo/issue_briefs_and_memos/Community_High_School_of_Vermont2.pdf.
- 8 Illinois Sentencing Advisory Council, "HB 2265/SB 2267 Sentence Enhancements for Unlawful Use of a Weapon (UUV) Offenses, 720 ILCS 5/24-1.1, 5/24-1.6 and 5/24-1.8" (2013), http://www.icjia.state.il.us/spac/pdf/HB2265_SB2267_SPAC_Analysis.pdf.
- 9 2013 Conn Pub Acts 13-247, § 42.
- 10 2011 Mass Acts ch 68, § 189.
- 11 2013 Mass Acts ch 38, § 18(M)(c).
- 12 2013 Vt Laws 61.

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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.