

INNOVATION AND THE CITY

New York's next mayor will need to address a number of critical challenges facing the city. This report spotlights 15 innovative policies from cities across the U.S. and around the globe that could serve as a model.



UPDATING 311

A More Responsive, Transparent & Participatory 311

Boston & Chicago: 311 services in several cities are leveraging open source data and the capabilities of mobile computing to better serve residents and increase accountability among government agencies.



KINDERGARTEN TO COLLEGE SAVINGS

Fostering a College-Going Culture & Allaying Rising Tuition Costs

San Francisco: The City of San Francisco is funding the country's first universal college savings account program for all of its public school kindergartners. The initiative will foster a college-going culture and alleviate rising tuition costs.



INNOVATION LOAN FUND

Loan Fund Seeds New Ideas at the Agency Level

Chicago: Chicago's multi-million dollar, revolving loan fund surfaces the most promising new ideas generated within city agencies—ideas intended to pay for themselves within five years through marked improvements in service delivery.



PROJECT ORACLE

Measuring Impact in Human Services

London: A mayoral-led consortium of foundations and universities in London is moving all nonprofit youth organizations toward consistent, academically rigorous evaluation measures, a revolutionary turn away from the norm in performance monitoring of social service providers. The new system will for the first time enable the city to gauge and compare the relative progress made by publicly funded entities who work with disadvantaged teens and families.



PEAK ACADEMY

Sending Agency Staff to Innovation School

Denver: Based on the belief that true innovation must be embraced by line-level staff as much as by mayors and agency heads, Denver has launched Peak Academy, an innovation school where city employees can get training, develop new ideas and gain support for new approaches.



LONDON

Crowdsourcing Capital Projects

London: Using a new crowdsourcing website, the funding of capital projects—bridges, gardens, community centers—is being transformed throughout the United Kingdom as communities develop and jointly fund major new projects with local government.



ZERO WASTE

A Comprehensive Approach to Increasing Recycling & Improving Waste Management

San Francisco: San Francisco introduced its Zero Waste program in 2002. Progress has been swift. From 1990 to 2010, recycling rates rose from 20 percent to 77 percent. Recent waste management reforms have targeted retail, packaging, consumption, public events, government procurement and construction and debris.



DIGITAL BADGING

Creating an Alternative Assessment System for Out-of-School Programs

Philadelphia, Providence and Chicago: Philadelphia, Chicago and Providence have all begun to introduce digital badging initiatives that allow students both inside the K-12 system and outside to earn credentials for skills they learn in a wide variety of educational settings, from digital tools workshops at public libraries to art classes at museums.



BUDGET SAVINGS COMMISSION

Private Firms Develop Mass Budget Savings

Chicago: A coalition of Chicago’s top corporate consulting and law firms crafted a \$100-million budget-savings plan for the incoming mayor—at no cost.



IMMIGRANT EXPORT INITIATIVE

Helping Immigrant-Run Businesses Grow through Exporting

Los Angeles & Chicago: Immigrant entrepreneurs account for a disproportionate share of new businesses, and given their language skills and established networks in their native countries, there is clear potential for many to export their goods and services. Chicago and Los Angeles are targeting these enterprises in order to double citywide exports, thereby boosting local economic growth.



COMMUTER TAX BENEFIT

Expanding Access to Federal Pre-Tax Transit Benefits

San Francisco: The City of San Francisco now requires businesses in the city with 20 or more employees to provide employees with tax-free commuter benefits.



CITY ID PREPAID MASTERCARD

Municipal Identification & Debit Card

Oakland: Oakland has unveiled a new city government ID card with a novel debit card feature. Designed to assist low-income, “underbanked” individuals, it offers ease-of-access to reputable banking and government services.



PRIZE-LINKED SAVINGS

Incentivizing Savings Accounts in Underbanked Communities

Michigan: Under a new model, cash prizes are used to incentivize underbanked individuals to open and make regular deposits into a traditional savings account. The initiatives aim to dramatically increase the number of low-income families enrolled in the banking system.



ACCESSORY DWELLING UNITS & BASEMENT CONVERSIONS

Helping the Elderly to Comfortably & Affordably “Age in Place”

Seattle, Vancouver & Santa Cruz: An Accessory Dwelling Unit is a small, self-contained residential structure sharing a lot with an existing house. In Seattle, Vancouver and Santa Cruz, legislation was enacted to permit ADUs on sufficiently sized lots in one- and two-family zones. Building regulations were also relaxed to allow formerly illegal subdivisions to be safely brought to code without facing severe fines.



OPEN DATA

A More Transparent, Inclusive & Collaborative Government

Seattle & San Francisco: Convinced that open data does not just improve the transparency of government, but governance itself, Seattle and San Francisco have used open data to spur inter-agency information sharing and encourage participation from parties outside of the public sector.

NYU Wagner

Center for an Urban Future

The Wagner Innovation Labs are a part of the NYU Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service. They are a new series of experiments that marry theory and practice to promote informed, evidence-based policymaking in a complex world. Each Lab has its own focus and approach, and operates independently, but all reflect NYU Wagner’s broad commitment to bringing scholars, thinkers and practitioners together to enrich the policymaking process.

The Center for an Urban Future is a NYC-based policy institute dedicated to highlighting the critical opportunities and challenges facing New York and other cities, and providing fresh ideas and workable solutions to policymakers. The Center’s primary focus is on growing and diversifying the local economy, expanding economic opportunity and targeting problems facing low-income and working-class neighborhoods.