



TIPS FOR Building a Behavioral Science Initiative in City Government

#1: Go Local	<i>When starting out, find academics with an applied focus in government who call your city, county, or state home. Going local creates a virtuous cycle where researchers can apply their skills locally by getting a richer view of the problem. It is easier to see and experience the problem first hand, incorporate feedback from constituents, meet in-person, and build relationships that can be sustained for many years.</i>
#2: Define the Partnership	<i>Investing in a partnership takes time to ensure that it is mutually beneficial. It is important for city leadership to support the academic needs of a given project and to protect the time and effort of academic partners. Academics will often find themselves needing to compromise, at times allowing city priorities to override their own. Finding a balance between answering an important policy question and building the academic and theoretical evidence base is key.</i>
#3: Emphasize Cost-Savings	<i>Cities across the nation are facing budget cuts from both the federal and state level. Departments are often asked to provide the same level of services, or more, despite shrinking budgets. In light of this, sharing behavioral science as cost-cutting, time-saving, or revenue-generating is a winning approach. (Of course, you need to walk the walk too.)</i>
#4: Make the Process Easy	<i>Make the expectations for partnering transparent from the start. City departments should be assured that a new initiative is not trying to burden them with additional work or new projects. Rather, the goal is to integrate behavioral science methodologies with their current work to achieve existing goals and improve outcomes.</i>
#5: Create a Shared Language	<i>Partnerships move more smoothly when stakeholders can establish a shared, plain language during meetings and in meeting memos. In particular, it saves time and effort for both city partners and academics when what is meant by behavioral science is clearly defined from the beginning. Both academics and city officials should also check their jargon at the door.</i>
#6: Make Nice with Your Lawyer	<i>It is standard for city research projects to require Institutional Review Board approval or exemptions. Any projects that require sharing city data will require legal review. If you plan to bring behavioral science to your city, you're going to need a lawyer.</i>
#7: One Size Doesn't Fit All	<i>City partners have vastly different abilities when implementing behavioral science. Some departments will need support in developing research questions and thinking through the details of implementing an RCT, others pulling together appropriate data. Each partner has unique needs for their project that your group will need to adapt to.</i>
#8: Embed Behavioral Science in Broader Initiatives	<i>Don't make behavioral science just a thing for policy wonks and academics tucked away in conference rooms in City Hall. Embed it into the fabric of city operations and make it a positive force for promoting evidence-based policy more broadly.</i>