



DATA BRIEF

2022 Allegheny County Annual Local Government Competition

Innovating in the Aftershock of COVID-19: A Post-Pandemic Local Government Playbook

May 2023

INTRODUCTION

In 2022, the Allegheny County Local Government Case Competition (Case Competition) resumed fully in person following a two-year hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The competition, generously funded by the Human Services Integration Fund (HSIF), offers interdisciplinary teams of graduate students from a variety of universities an opportunity to tackle an existing and significant local government problem and devise an innovative solution to present to a panel of judges.

From November 9th through 12th, 46 graduate students from local universities participated in the 2022 Case Competition for a chance to win up to \$3500 per team.

Wednesday evening, students gathered for an opening night dinner, met their assigned teammates and received their challenge. Teams worked together for two days before returning on Saturday to present their solutions before panels of judges comprised of industry leaders, educators, foundation officers and DHS staff.

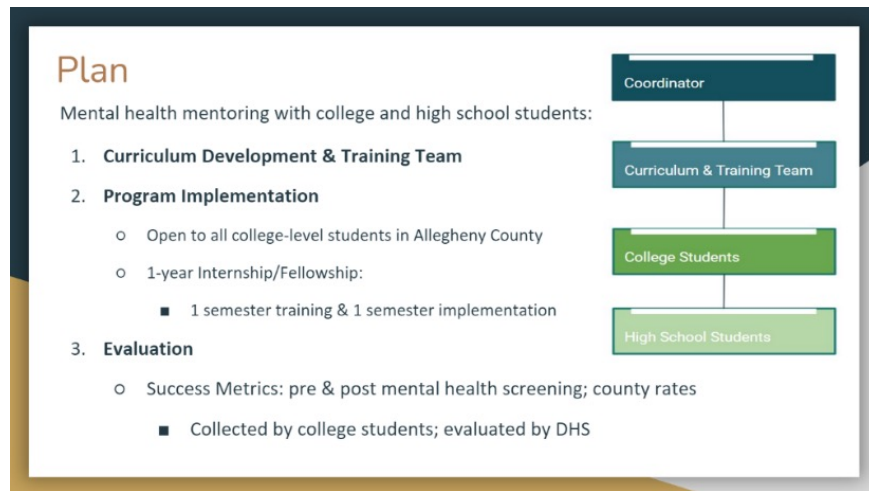
THE CASE CHALLENGE

The 2022 case, *Innovating in the Aftershock of COVID-19: A Post-Pandemic Local Government Playbook*, acknowledged that the pandemic exposed and exacerbated existing inequalities that will create long-lasting societal effects, placing even more demand on local government systems in the coming decades. Considering this, students were asked to craft a solution to a pandemic-related impact with the goal of managing its long-term implications.

THE WINNING SOLUTIONS

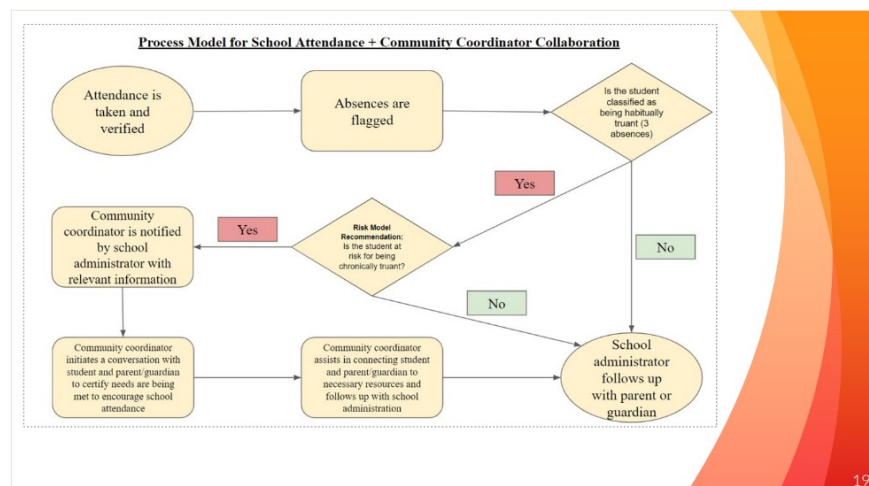
1st Place: Adolescent Mental Health Solutions via Mentorships

This team proposed a sustainable plan for mental health mentoring between college and high school students that set forth the establishment of a curriculum development and training team and outlined a strategy for program implementation and evaluation.



2nd Place: Becoming Proactive, not Punitive, with Truancy: Establishing Equity-Based Attendance Reporting and Removing Punitive Association with Absenteeism

This team addressed the significant increase in truancy since COVID-19 and the reality that current responses to truancy involve inequitable interventions, overlook unaddressed needs and do not effectively engage school administration in the problem. Their solution offered a universal attendance application, a risk model to consider factors such as IEP status, demographics, housing or food instability, mental health and more, and a Community Coordinator to intervene and remove barriers to accessing necessary resources faced by both the student and the family.



3rd Place: Healing on Wheels: Bringing Support Near You

This team proposed a mobile mental health clinic to visit different underserved communities on a rotating basis. In addition to psychological evaluations and therapy, services would include psychoeducation on mental health, case management to connect to services and referrals for further treatment.

Our Solution

- Mobile Mental Health Clinic
 - Changes location - different impoverished area each day
 - Park in an easy area to access such as a school or recreational center
 - Find the location through website or an app
- Plan to expand and have a truck specifically for each impoverished area
- Several private and sound proof cubicles/offices to meet with multiple people at a time



4th Place: Community Connectors

In this team’s plan, local residents would be trained and paid to serve as mental health liaisons to youth from underserved communities, including the Black community, low-income communities, the LGBTQ+ community and people with disabilities. Community Connectors would utilize models of community engagement to normalize holistic wellness and provide transportation to a variety of needed resources to improve accessibility.

Proposed Plan: Community Connector

What Community Connectors would do:



- Provide needed accessibility
 - Buses/rideshare
 - Digital divide accommodations
- Facilitate healing-focused dialogue within and between groups
 - Create affirming spaces to process oppression and trauma collectively
 - Discuss potential pathways to move forward through oppression
- Deepen connection with existing community resources and groups
 - Drop-in intergroup dialogue events
 - Connect more youth with resources for empowerment, harm-reduction, and education
 - Encourage youth to join community groups and step into leadership

COMMUNITY CONNECTORS

CONCLUSION

DHS conducts the Local Government Case Competition for the dual purposes of 1) eliciting new ideas that the County and judges from partner organizations seriously consider using in our work and 2) exposing talented students from varied disciplines to the breadth and importance of real-world challenges, with the hopes of enticing them to pursue careers in local government.

Once again, all teams presented creative and thoughtful solutions to the challenge set before them. In doing so, they delved into the COVID-19-exacerbated pressing needs of the County's vulnerable citizens and generated several inspired ideas to address them.

The annual Case Competition will be held again next year for graduate students interested in learning more about the public sector and contributing to the work of the Allegheny County Department of Human Services.

APPENDIX A

APPENDIX A: SUMMARY OF ALL TEAMS' PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

TEAM NAME AND MEMBERS	OVERVIEW OF TEAM'S SOLUTION
<p>[1st place] Birmingham</p> <p>Brook Russi Arias Carnegie Mellon University MS Public Policy & Management</p> <p>Melanie Diaz Carnegie Mellon University MS Public Policy & Management</p> <p>Katie Willis Duquesne University MA Applied & Public Sociology</p>	<p>“Adolescent Mental Health Solutions via Mentorship”</p> <p>Low-income youth within Allegheny County, specifically those in grades 6 through 12, have displayed greater mental health concerns and increased risk of suicide due to the COVID-19 pandemic. To provide these youth with additional support and services, a one-year fellowship opportunity will be created in collaboration with Allegheny County DHS. The fellowship will pair local college students with low-income, at-risk youth and has the overall goals of improving mental health outcomes and empowering youth to pursue a college education. To support the development of the fellowship, a program coordinator will be hired within DHS and will be responsible for hiring personnel, managing partnerships between colleges and high schools, and conducting program evaluation. By creating mentorship opportunities for low-income, at-risk youth, the mental health crisis can be addressed in a new, innovative way.</p>
<p>[2nd place] Westinghouse</p> <p>Laura Bessko University of Pittsburgh Master of Social Work</p> <p>Ricardo Ibarra-Gil Carnegie Mellon University Heinz, Public policy & Data Analytics</p> <p>Addakin Thomas Carnegie Mellon University Heinz, Healthcare policy and Management</p>	<p>“Becoming Proactive, not Punitive, with Truancy: Establishing Equity-Based Attendance Reporting and Removing Punitive Association with Absenteeism”</p> <p>The Pittsburgh Public School System has experienced an increase in chronic truancy rates since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Systems currently in place to address truancy within Allegheny County use punitive approaches such as fines, jail time and mandatory education programs for both students and their parents and guardians. To reduce the punitive association with absenteeism, a three-step program will be launched using an equity-based lens. The first step requires the development and use of a uniform, user-friendly attendance-tracking application to ensure accurate data across the County. A risk model will be created during the program’s second step to identify which students are more at risk for chronic absenteeism. By analyzing risk factors such as limited access to housing, food and transportation, at-risk students can be identified and provided with enhanced services and support. The third step utilizes Community Connectors to connect the identified at-risk students with resources like counseling services, food assistance programs and translation services. By directly addressing students’ risk factors, students will be able to spend more time within the classroom.</p>

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TEAM NAME AND MEMBERS	OVERVIEW OF TEAM'S SOLUTION
<p>[3rd place] Roberto Clemente</p> <p>Daniel Rudy University of Pittsburgh GSPIA MPA</p> <p>Christina Witman Chatham University MS - Clinical Psychology</p>	<p>“Healing on Wheels: Bringing Support Near You”</p> <p>Mental health concerns, specifically within impoverished and rural communities, have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Unfortunately, a variety of factors such as socioeconomic status, location and waitlist lengths impact the accessibility of services for many individuals. “Healing on Wheels,” a mobile mental health clinic, will provide individuals in impoverished and rural communities with increased access to services. The clinic, housed within a semi-truck and trailer, will be staffed by multiple culturally competent therapists, a psychologist, several case managers, and an in-home unit for severe cases and concerns. A mobile clinic will provide individuals an easy way to access support short-term until long-term services become available.</p>
<p>Greenfield</p> <p>Kemi Odumosu Carnegie Mellon MS Public Policy & Data Analytics</p> <p>Nabila Jamal Orozco University of Pittsburgh Psychology</p> <p>Stelle Scott Chatham University MS Clinical Psychology</p>	<p>“Community Connectors”</p> <p>Youth in Pittsburgh are experiencing increased mental health concerns due to a variety of social issues exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. To provide youth with support in addressing these concerns and overcoming systemic barriers, the “Community Connectors” program will train community residents to serve as mental health liaisons in underserved communities. Connectors will support youth with a variety of services including, but not limited to, access to transportation and technology, healing-focused group and intergroup dialogues, and educational resources. By supporting youth with a holistic approach, the community will experience decreased negative outcomes surrounding mental health, community violence and substance use</p>
<p>[4th place] Andy Warhol</p> <p>Miguel Avila Carnegie Mellon M.S. Public Policy and Management</p> <p>Meher Dhaliwal Carnegie Mellon MS Public Policy & Management</p> <p>Jordan M. Fields Carnegie Mellon MS Public Policy & Management</p>	<p>“Dignity for Home Care Workers: Reciprocating Care for Low-Wage Healthcare Professionals in Allegheny County”</p> <p>The COVID-19 pandemic and its multitude of effects has negatively impacted Home Care Workers. To increase awareness of the profession and eliminate barriers for workers in accessing transportation, healthcare and food, “Pittsburgh National Home Healthcare Month” will be launched in 2023. Throughout the month, workers will have access to free transportation via Pittsburgh Regional Transit as well as no-cost mental and physical health services, and will receive coupons and discounts for local grocery stores. Additionally, the month will feature a “Home Care Worker Festival” that will serve as a fundraiser for workers, advertisement for various agencies and support programs, and a Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) drive. By increasing support for and awareness of Home Care Workers, the frontline healthcare community will be better supported, thus resulting in decreased turnover rates within the profession.</p>

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TEAM NAME AND MEMBERS	OVERVIEW OF TEAM'S SOLUTION
<p>Fort Pitt</p> <p>Grant Van Robays University of Pittsburgh GSPIA MS Public Policy & Management</p> <p>Ryan Shen Carnegie Mellon M.S. Public Policy and Management</p> <p>Alison Wuensch Carnegie Mellon M.S. Public Policy and Management</p>	<p>“Preventing Truancy through Mentor Matching”</p> <p>Increases in both truancy and chronic absenteeism have occurred within Allegheny County due to the COVID-19 pandemic. “MentorMatch,” a collaborative mentorship program headed by Allegheny County DHS, pairs truant students with mentors via mentor matching software. The program provides students with opportunities to not only develop relationships with mentors from their communities but strives to reduce feelings of social isolation and provide a community-based, non-punitive approach to truancy. To support the development and evaluation of the program, DHS will hire a “MentorMatch” program director. By creating an alternative approach to connect with truant and chronically absent students, students will be provided with increased support within their educational and social endeavors.</p>
<p>Fort Duquesne</p> <p>Nick Lynn Carnegie Mellon M.S. Public Policy and Management</p> <p>Gina Rosso University of Pittsburgh School of Law</p> <p>January Yurchak MA — Psychology</p>	<p>“The Wilkinsburg Initiative: The True Cost of Truancy”</p> <p>In a pre-pandemic world, the Wilkinsburg School District reported high truancy rates. Unfortunately, the effects of the pandemic allowed concerns surrounding education and attendance to fester, thus identifying a need for educational supports within the community. To address concerns surrounding truancy, a multi-pronged, centralized interface based on Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs will be created for students and caregivers. The interface provides a variety of basic needs supports such as complimentary breakfast and lunch during the school week, satellite enabled Wi-Fi throughout the community, virtual mental health support, continuing education opportunities for youth in the summer, a “Walk With Me!” peer-to-peer accountability network and more. By focusing on stabilizing basic needs, the community will be better equipped to attend to and engage in their students’ education.</p>
<p>Highland Park</p> <p>Manikandan Palaniappan Carnegie Mellon M.S. Public Policy and Management</p> <p>Michael Rodriguez Carnegie Mellon M.S. Public Policy and Management</p> <p>Meredith Sechrist Duquesne University School of Law</p>	<p>“Building Bridges for the Community: Linking Missing Talent to Opportunity in Allegheny County”</p> <p>The Covid-19 pandemic impacted the labor market in detrimental ways, with thousands of employees laid off in Allegheny County alone. Today, many of these workers are still struggling to find jobs, yet employers are actively seeking quality employees to fill vacant positions. To assist and connect job seekers with reputable companies, Allegheny County DHS will partner with the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh to launch a database that identifies unemployed individuals, a job marketplace to connect employers with potential employees, monthly industry-specific career fairs and more. Due to its large number of locations throughout the county, partnering with the Carnegie Library allows DHS to reach an extensive number of individuals, offer free access for residents, and engage an extensive volunteer base to assist with the various initiatives. Launching these initiatives will increase networking opportunities for both job seekers and employers, thus reducing the pandemic’s impact on the workforce.</p>

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TEAM NAME AND MEMBERS	OVERVIEW OF TEAM'S SOLUTION
<p>Hot Metal</p> <p>Alexis Witkovitz Chatham University MS Clinical Psychology</p> <p>Ibrahim Kante Carnegie Mellon MS Public Policy & Management</p> <p>Apoorva Shetty Carnegie Mellon MS Public Policy & Management</p> <p>Roscoe Bright University of Pittsburgh Master of Social Work</p>	<p>“Project U”</p> <p>“Project U,” a preparatory program that provides disadvantaged students with skills and tools to achieve economic mobility, strives to curtail the long-lasting societal effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on high school youth. The program provides students with two-hour sessions twice a week that focus on self-development, community building, career development, self-care and bridge-building. Additionally, the program provides students with mentorship opportunities for increased social and emotional support throughout their young adult years. By providing increased education and mentorship opportunities, students will have greater exposure to career advancement opportunities, increased school attendance due to interest and investment in a skill-based, interactive curriculum, and boosted engagement due to enhanced social and emotional support.</p>
<p>McKees Rocks</p> <p>Cathleen Flynn Duquesne University PhD Clinical Psychology</p> <p>Abdul Gaffar Carnegie Mellon MS Public Policy & Management</p> <p>Justin Poser Carnegie Mellon MS Public Policy & Management</p>	<p>“Origin Stories: Empowering Students through Storytelling”</p> <p>Students in Allegheny County have experienced increased isolation and learning loss due to the COVID-19 pandemic. To help reduce this isolation and recalibrate learning, a three-phased program will be launched throughout Pittsburgh’s public school system. The program, “Origin Stories,” will provide students with opportunities to share how they utilized ‘superpowers’ to overcome challenges during the pandemic. School staff will analyze responses from phase one and choose a select number of students to advance to phase two, where they will participate in a ‘Superhero Academy.’ The Academy will provide students with opportunities to develop sharing skills and receive mentorship from local ‘heroes,’ as well. The third phase, ‘Voice of a Hero,’ will allow students to share their concerns with state-level policy makers and school and County officials to inspire changemaking within their respective schools and communities. By participating in the program, students will develop social-emotional and coping skills and learn to address trauma and anxiety, thus resulting in enhanced learning outcomes and comfort in addressing adversity.</p>

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TEAM NAME AND MEMBERS	OVERVIEW OF TEAM'S SOLUTION
<p>Rankin</p> <p>Druta Bhatt Carnegie Mellon MS Public Policy & Management</p> <p>Waseem Khan Carnegie Mellon MS Public Policy & Management</p> <p>Myles Cramer University of Pittsburgh-GSPIA MS Public Policy & Management</p>	<p>“Project Touch BASE: Biofeedback Analytics Suite & Early Intervention”</p> <p>The social, physical and mental wellbeing of K-5 students has been impacted by school closures, social isolation and other effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. To address rising mental and physical health challenges, early intervention strategies are needed. “Project Touch BASE” provides students with a Fitbit-like fitness tracker to monitor academic performance, physical activity and sleep patterns. Results are shared with parents and educators and are analyzed to determine which intervention supports, if any, are necessary to promote physical and emotional wellbeing. By partaking in the program, students will receive personalized support and services, resulting in overall enhanced social competency and the development of healthy habits such as consistent sleep patterns and increased physical activity.</p>
<p>Schenley</p> <p>Lily Alvey Carnegie Mellon MS Public Policy & Management</p> <p>Bikash Gupta Carnegie Mellon MS Public Policy & Management</p> <p>Charley Hall University of Pittsburgh Master of Social Work</p>	<p>“BRIDGE”</p> <p>The COVID-19 pandemic placed additional strains on the accessibility of educational and community resources for the immigrant communities in Pittsburgh. Additionally, language barriers and information asymmetry prevented many families from having an active role in their children’s education. The “BRIDGE” app, a platform designed to be all-encompassing and easily accessible, provides families with information on educational and community resources in their native language. By using the app, families can easily access information on college readiness, economic mobility, wellness, family support and more. The app strives to eliminate a lack of access to technology by being compatible with a variety of smartphones and other handheld devices that families may already consistently use.</p>

APPENDIX B

APPENDIX B: CASE COMPETITION JUDGES AND PARTICIPATING UNIVERSITIES

Judges

Laura Cuniff	IT Specialist, United States General Services Administration
Tammy Thompson	Founder & Executive Director, Catapult Greater Pittsburgh
Kelly Prokop	Operations Director, Prevention Point Pittsburgh
Alex Jutca	DHS Deputy Director for Analytics, Technology & Planning
Christophe Combemale	Data Scientist, DHS Office of Analytics, Technology & Planning
Kristen Allen	Data Scientist, DHS Office of Analytics, Technology & Planning
Marcel Minutolo	Professor of Strategic Management, Robert Morris university
Jay Finch	CEO, PolydeltaAI
Kelsey Shannon	Director of Business and Corporate Relations, Pittsburgh Regional Transit
Beth Wild	CEO, UPMC Cancer Institute
Rev. Brenda Gregg	Founder & Executive Director, Project Destiny
Rob Cherry	CEO, Partner4Work

University Participants

Chatham University

School of Health Sciences

Carnegie Mellon University

Dietrich School of Humanities and Social Sciences

Heinz College

Duquesne University

Thomas R. Kline School of Law

McAnulty Graduate School of Liberal arts

Edinboro University

School of Social Work

University of Pittsburgh

School of Social Work

Graduate School of Public Health

Graduate School of Public and International Affairs

School of Medicine

Robert Morris University

School of Business