



Fall 2021 Engaged Learning Projects

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Note: These are executive summaries of the student projects. For the full reports, please contact us at ContactP3E@umich.edu.

Strategic Public Policy Consulting



The Ford School's Strategic Public Policy Consulting course is a semester-long Master's level course that engages students in a supervised consulting project with a real-world client. Teams of 3-6 students work with a faculty coordinator and client representative to: develop a project work plan; collect relevant materials and information; conduct research and analysis; prepare a written report; and present findings and recommendations to the client. Students are expected to produce professional-quality work at minimal cost to the client. In return, clients are asked to help provide students with a valuable, engaging educational and professional experience.



“Training Future Policymakers”

Client: City of Detroit/Civil Rights, Inclusion & Opportunity Department



Executive Summary

The team provided a framework and guide for future policy makers enrolled in the City of Detroit's Executive Leadership Program. The presentation is divided into three categories: policy making process, influences on the policy making process, and limitation on influences/ethics.

There are six steps identified in the policy making process: proposing legislation; submitting legislation to City Council; public input; committee hearings; voting; implementation; and corporation council review. City Administration may also create regulations, decisions or executive orders.

Policy can be influenced by various forms of lobbying. Types of lobbying can include peer and public pressure, grassroots movements, paid interests, and direct communication. Common participants such as community members or constituents, city departments, religious groups, and news media can influence the proposal and passage of legislation.

Limitations are placed on influences and influencers of the policy making process through reporting requirements, campaign finance laws, post employment rules and an ethics ordinance.

The presentation also includes exercises to test the participants' ethics rules knowledge using hypothetical situations.



“Building Stakeholder Capacity for Impact Investing”

Client: Council of Michigan Foundations



Executive Summary

Impact investing is the practice of investing to both seek a financial return and create tangible social or environmental benefits. It is a tool that is emerging in philanthropy providing foundations new ways to use their capital more effectively and create social impact while possibly gaining a financial return or return on capital. The goal of this project was to support the Council of Michigan Foundations' (CMF) efforts to provide impact investing education and resources for the CMF community of philanthropy. It provides a starting point for foundations that are interested in this emerging practice that can support their missions, help nonprofit or for-profit organizations work towards social impact in their local communities, deploy more capital, and leverage partnerships with other community investors.

The report includes information on the key features of impact investing, including history on the emergence of the practice and the various investment vehicles and commonly cited barriers to impact investing in Michigan. It also provides the steps for foundations considering starting their impact investing journeys and best practices informed by the impact investing literature and several interviews conducted with Michigan-based foundations. Finally, the report provides a list of sectors that are ripe for impact investment recommended by foundations previously interviewed by CMF.

“Assessing Special Ed Teacher Shortages in US K-12 Schools”

Client: U.S. Government Accountability Office



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Executive Summary

Numerous factors contribute to special education teacher and paraprofessional shortages in K-12 education in the United States. The project is a comprehensive literature review that examines existing information and data on this topic, identifies gaps in research and access to information, and offers some potential policy solutions or responses.

The team’s key takeaways and conclusions from the literature review:

- Better certification, recruitment, and retention policies at the local, state, and federal levels are needed to respond to shortages and prevent future shortages in special education.
- More research, both qualitative and quantitative, is needed to fill information and data gaps, particularly in the context of paraprofessionals. Much of the data was concentrated on small samples, outdated, state-specific, or focused on discontinued federal policies.
- More attention and research at the federal level, particularly for groups like GAO, would be valuable. This is especially true considering the level of regional and district-level variation that currently exists in terms of data and policies.
- Special education support staff and paraprofessionals should be considered in the context of broader teacher shortages since these positions are so closely connected to each other and, in many cases, depend on one another.

“Senior Community Service Employment Program Outcomes”

Client: U.S. Government Accountability Office



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Executive Summary

The Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) provides subsidized community service work to low-income Americans 55 and older. The program is unique in that it targets older workers and offers insight into employment outcomes later in life. SCSEP has two statutory goals, providing opportunities for community service and transitioning participants to unsubsidized employment. This report explores how well SCSEP is meeting its dual purpose before turning to whether those proposals are broad enough to capture the important benefits of SCSEP.

The report specifically:

- Examines SCSEP’s ability to provide community service positions to the target population.
- Evaluates SCSEP’s ability to transition participants into unsubsidized employment.
- Considers whether the performance accountability system encourages better management in service of SCSEP’s dual purpose.
- Assesses SCSEP’s benefits in addition to providing community service and transitioning participants to unsubsidized employment.
- Analyzes the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on SCSEP.



“Economic Impacts of Resilient Investments in the Great Lakes”

Client: Great Lakes Commission



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Executive Summary

The team’s research evaluated the economic benefits of three city-government climate resilience projects implemented in the Great Lakes Region (GLR). The case studies are adaptation projects implemented in Toledo, Ohio, Two Harbors, Minnesota and Ann Arbor, Michigan. The cases indicate climate-resilience focused interventions were cost-beneficial for Two Harbors and Ann Arbor and projected to be cost-beneficial for Toledo. The research illustrates the complexity of climate-resiliency projects and the economic considerations that exist within them.

The report provides an overview of each project that includes a cost-benefit analysis, interviews with project related stakeholders, as well as a qualitative review of the best practices in climate resilience project implementation and evaluation. And concludes with several recommendations to strengthen the capacity and integrity of all climate-resilience based projects.

The team recommended GLC develop a standardized methodology for analysis that will evaluate the project and demonstrate actions to increase climate resiliency with measurable social or economic impact. They further encouraged GLC to utilize its position as a supporter of sustainability to promote data-driven projects, emphasizing a cost-benefit analysis before the project, and monitor the impacts of the project after implementation.



“Understanding the Risks of a Changing Climate for the Great Lakes”

Client: Great Lakes Commission



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Executive Summary

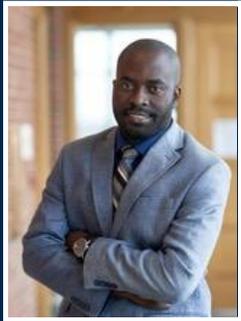
The Great Lakes Commission’s Action Plan for a Resilient Great Lakes notes, “All members of the Great Lakes community have a role to play in securing a more resilient Great Lakes Basin.”

One such role community members can play, and a stated goal across the Action Plan, was to connect existing knowledge on the Great Lakes Basin and ensure community expertise is available. Responding to this need in the community, the Great Lakes Commission (GLC), in partnership with Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy, sought to aggregate existing studies and assessments that identify risks related to climate change in the Great Lakes Basin, in order to create a comprehensive and interactive resource library (IRL), and identify knowledge gaps for future study and assessment.

The students researched knowledge gaps and found opportunities for research that could aid governments in making their states more resilient to climate change risks. The main opportunities identified were (1) understanding the interconnectedness of the impacts and (2) the need for increased collaboration between government agencies and other stakeholders. In addition, the research team highlighted the lack of an equity and environmental justice (EEJ) lens in most found research conducted in the Great Lakes Basin. While EEJ is acknowledged to be increasingly important topics in climate risk assessment, research on the region has not yet progressed to examine the inequitable effects of climate change in a robust way.



“The People’s Budgeting Project”
Client: Interfaith Council for Peace & Justice



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Executive Summary

The team’s research sought to uncover how to create a more participatory, justice-centered budgeting process for Washtenaw County. Their final presentation summarizes these findings in a way that’s accessible to citizens looking to become engaged around this issue.

The team focused on 1) current county budget processes and 2) best practices for implementing participatory budgeting. They found that while change tends to be incremental, there are signs that trying to create more opportunities to change the budgeting process is viable. If those changes come in the form of participatory budgeting, it will be crucial to involve officials early in the process and develop pilot programs to build trust within the constituent communities. More work remains to be done to make participatory budgeting a reality in Washtenaw County and future efforts should continue to focus on bringing in stakeholders at all levels to create more inclusive participatory budgeting processes.

“Analysis of Community Capital Impacts”
Client: National Coalition for Community Capital



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Executive Summary

Made possible by the 2012 JOBS Act, Community Capital fundraising has become an increasingly popular way for small regional businesses and fledgling startups to raise capital while providing investment opportunities to investors at all levels of income and sophistication. This report analyzes data from Honeycomb Credit, a major crowdfunding platform, to evaluate SEC regulations on crowdfunding, identify gaps in current reporting requirements, and recommend areas for further research. The team looked at comparisons between businesses within two major cities, Pittsburgh and Cleveland, due to the greatest data availability and more importantly the recent focus in each city on revitalization.

Across both cities, more than 70 small businesses have successfully raised debt financing through Honeycomb. The team analyzed their finances against the demographic data of the business owners and the surrounding communities. They found that this specific platform provides women and minority business owners access to capital at a higher rate than traditional forms of capital such as bank loans and venture funding.

Though this report established the relationship, its cause requires further research. How platforms like Honeycomb impact equity and access in the context of the broader capital markets is not well defined and the metrics to evaluate the relationship have not been established. To better understand these gaps and inform future regulatory changes we contend that standard data collection requirements need to be established across the industry to make longitudinal analysis possible.



“Food Security Landscape”

Client: Oakland County



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Executive Summary

Oakland County maintains a high standard of living, but food insecurity exists throughout pockets of the county. For Oakland County to maintain and further strengthen its economic prosperity, community health, and workforce, it must reconsider its approach to meeting its communities' basic needs.

In March of 2021, the American Rescue Plan (ARP) was signed into law, distributing money to states and counties to address urgent COVID-19 response efforts and the systemic public health effects that have contributed to the unequal impact of the pandemic. The students were tasked with identifying the current food insecurity landscape in Oakland County and provide key recommendations for county stakeholders to consider. The key findings suggest that Oakland County residents have been grappling with food insecurity despite strong efforts by food pantries, schools, and other current interventions to mitigate food insecurity.

After assessing the available data, the team recommended three action steps:

- Oakland County should develop an equitable data collection framework that is responsive to different community needs.
- Oakland County should explore innovative ways to increase their internal capacity and strengthen outreach efforts regarding services available to its residents.
- Oakland County should engage in policy solutions and/or best practices to increase access to programs for communities in need.



Practical Community Learning Projects



The Practical Community Learning Project (PCLP) matches undergraduate and graduate Ford School students and community partners for a semester-long, policy-based, two credit independent study project. Projects provide opportunities for dialogue, research and service through conducting program evaluations, policy research, grant writing, and other activities as jointly agreed upon with their community partners.

“Tobacco Policy in Schools”

Community Partner: American Heart Association



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Executive Summary

This team of students partnered with the American Heart Association Department of Health Strategies to help develop recommendations for schools to use in developing tobacco policies. The team researched current school policies throughout Michigan and the U.S. to identify best practices of reducing tobacco usage among student populations. The students were encouraged to identify policies that use a lesser or non-punitive approach in terms of punishing offenders within a student body. In addition, the team used their findings to craft policy recommendations for revising current policies.

Through qualitative interviews the team determined that policy interventions comprised of digital curriculum and/or mobile applications may be the most feasible given the COVID-19 pandemic. Addressing this nascent problem will ultimately help improve the mental health and educational outcomes of students.



“Business and Building Owner Resource Connections”

Community Partner: Community and Economic Development Department,
City of Hamtramck, Michigan



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Executive Summary

The Hamtramck Practical Community Learning Project (PCLP) team had three specific objectives: design a one-page resource guide informed by research and merchant focus groups; develop a database of small business resources from local, state, and federal partners; and assist the Hamtramck Community and Economic Department (CED) team in facilitating a city-wide merchant meeting. These objectives were successfully completed by the student team over a three-step effort involving analysis, resource development and design, and resource implementation. The team assisted in the planning and execution of the merchant meeting in which business and building owners were able to connect directly with representatives from the resource partners identified throughout the project. In recognition of the team’s work the City of Hamtramck City Council formally recognized the team members during their council meeting in December.



“Landlord Engagement and Best Practices”
Community Partner: Homelessness Action Network of Detroit



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Executive Summary

The Homeless Action Network of Detroit (HAND) is developing a coordinated approach to engage with landlords to rent to people experiencing homelessness in Detroit to ease coordination and communication by consolidating housing resources into one system-wide database. The researchers' role focused on investigating housing databases and best practices, compiling contacts and resources for use in the database, conducting case studies of successful landlord engagement in comparable cities, and compiling a report of the findings. Their report provides HAND with the necessary information to efficiently design, produce, and implement the database.

“Scan of Cybersecurity Training Programs”
Community Partner: UM-Flint Office of Economic Development



Executive Summary

The University of Michigan-Flint Office of Economic Development received a Cybersecurity Training Center designation and is interested in pursuing and implementing cybersecurity training in North Flint. The team recommended a cybersecurity training program, CyberStart America, and identified a community center, Berston Field House, to gauge community interest and discuss implementing this program. They also worked with Berston Field House to create a survey to be used to understand community interest, which can also be used as supporting documentation for future grant proposals by UM-Flint.