

Proposal to Create a Research Practice Partnership for the District of Columbia

Pursuant to the District of Columbia Education Research Practice Partnership Establishment and Audit Act of 2018

Submitted by the Urban Institute on behalf of itself and the members of the proposed District of Columbia Education Research Collaborative: American University's School of Education, Bellwether Education Partners, the Brookings Institution, D.C. Policy Center, EmpowerK12, Georgetown University, George Washington University's Trachtenberg School of Public Policy and Public Administration, Howard University's School of Education, Mathematica, Raise DC, Trinity Washington University, the University of the District of Columbia, the University of Maryland, and the University of Virginia's EdPolicyWorks.

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3.1.1 Executive Summary

A successful research practice partnership (RPP) for the District of Columbia will provide high-quality independent research that is useful to policymakers, district and school leaders, teachers, families, and others working to improve public schools and ensure equitable outcomes for all DC students.

We are 15 DC-area organizations that have come together to build such an RPP by forming the District of Columbia Education Research Collaborative (hereafter, “the Collaborative”). Coordinated by the Urban Institute, the Collaborative offers broad and deep expertise in education research and practice and is committed to supporting student success and school improvement in DC.

This proposal outlines how we will organize and manage the Collaborative to ensure it supports continuous improvement in the District’s schools. Based on lessons from other RPPs and needs voiced by the education community, our model leverages the strengths of our member organizations while ensuring a commitment to high-quality research done in partnership with schools, education leaders, and families.

The Collaborative’s proposed membership, structure, and approach is rooted in five principles: (1) **independence** from funders and from government to ensure objectivity and credibility with the wider community, (2) **collaboration** with education stakeholders and among Collaborative members, (3) **research integrity and quality** according to the highest scientific standards, (4) **relevance** to local decisionmakers, and (5) **transparency** of data, methods, and findings.

The Collaborative will be led by an executive director based at the Urban Institute (Urban), an established nonprofit, independent research organization with a long history of partnering with the executive and legislative branches of the DC government, including on education projects. As the Collaborative’s managing entity, Urban will ensure every project undertaken by RPP researchers is designed in tandem with a practice partner, is responsive to the Advisory Committee’s agenda, meets high standards of quality and collaboration, and is disseminated effectively to key stakeholders. Urban has the staff and expertise in research, data science, fundraising, community outreach, and business operations to do this well and has the institutional strength and resources to create a new entity and sustain it over the long term.

Member organizations will contribute to the RPP by leading or supporting research projects, including by designing studies, creating research products, translating findings for diverse audiences, and supporting education leaders across the city in using results from RPP projects to drive educational decisions and continuous improvement. Member organizations will also contribute to the RPP’s strategic direction through their representation on a Leadership Council that works closely with the executive director.

Finally, DC education stakeholders will play a key role in the RPP as members of the Advisory Committee, practice partners on projects, or contacts from whom we seek feedback during the research process. Community engagement is woven throughout our proposal, and we have proposed mechanisms to ensure everyone—classroom teachers, students and parents, government officials, and nonprofit leaders—has a voice. Engaging a wide range of stakeholders in a project’s design and implementation is critical to effectively addressing local needs and challenges. We believe deeply

engaging communities in the research process will foster culturally relevant research; lead to more effective programs, services, and policies; and empower the community.

As detailed below, the Collaborative offers a clear vision for RPP work, how it differs from traditional education research, and how to make sure it is useful to policy and practice partners. That vision has been built in consultation with RPP leaders around the country, and four of those leaders—from Chicago, Tennessee, New Orleans, and San Francisco—have committed to help implement that vision as advisers to the Collaborative. With their help, and by remaining true to the values described above, the partnership between the Collaborative and DC’s education stakeholders will support school improvement and strengthen student outcomes for years to come.

3.1.2 Information about the Independent, Nongovernmental Entity

Mission and History

The proposed District of Columbia Education Research Collaborative is a consortium of 15 education research and practice organizations in the DC region. Our mission as a Collaborative is to provide everyone with a stake in the success of DC students with robust, accurate information to support decisions that improve outcomes and increase equity.

The Urban Institute is the Collaborative’s fiscal and operational lead entity, and Urban’s mission is to “open minds, shape decisions, and offer solutions through economic and social policy research.” For more than 50 years, Urban’s experts have evaluated policies and practices, crafted new solutions, and identified areas meriting further investigation. Urban believes decisions shaped by facts, rather than ideology, have the power to reduce hardship among the most vulnerable, expand opportunities for all people, and strengthen the effectiveness of government.

Urban’s staff of over 500 includes social scientists, communicators, mathematicians, demographers, and data scientists who are driven by a passion to ensure that everyone, regardless of income, race or ethnicity, education, or zip code, has the chance to achieve their highest potential. Urban’s work covers all major areas of public policy, including education, the labor market, health, housing, retirement, the safety net, taxes, and criminal justice.

Urban’s education researchers use cutting-edge research and communications methods to provide actionable and accurate answers to questions on a wide range of issues from prekindergarten through postsecondary education. The education team’s goal is to produce independent research that supports school improvement and student achievement, with a focus on vulnerable populations.

Members of the proposed Collaborative also aim to improve education policy and practice. Members’ missions, detailed in full in appendix A, include the following:

- American University’s School of Education works to create knowledge and prepare students to transform societies through education.
- Bellwether Education Partners is a national nonprofit focused on dramatically changing education and life outcomes for underserved children.
- The Brookings Institution is a nonprofit public policy organization that conducts in-depth research that leads to new ideas for solving problems facing society.

- The D.C. Policy Center is an independent, nonpartisan think tank committed to advancing policies for a strong and vibrant economy in the District of Columbia.
- EmpowerK12 is a local nonprofit working to empower education leaders with the right information, relevant skills, and proper systems to continuously improve educational institutions.
- Georgetown University is a leading international research university and the nation's oldest Catholic and Jesuit university.
- George Washington University's Trachtenberg School of Public Policy and Public Administration serves more than 400 students each year as they pursue postsecondary education in public policy, public administration, and environmental resource policy.
- The Howard University School of Education's mission is to prepare transformational leaders; to empower individuals, schools, and communities; and to promote racial and social justice locally, nationally, and globally.
- Mathematica's mission is to improve public well-being by bringing the highest standards of quality, objectivity, and excellence to bear on the provision of information collection and analysis.
- Raise DC's mission is to spur citywide actions to improve educational outcomes for all DC children and youth, from cradle to career.
- Trinity Washington University is a comprehensive institution offering a broad range of educational programs that prepare students across the lifespan for the intellectual, ethical, and spiritual dimensions of contemporary work, civic, and family life.
- The University of the District of Columbia is the District's only public historically black land-grant, emerging-research university dedicated to serving the needs of the community of the District of Columbia to provide pathways to the middle class.
- The University of Maryland's College of Education enhances the lives of individuals, families, schools, and communities through research, teaching, and engagement.
- The University of Virginia's EdPolicyWorks is a research center that brings together faculty, students, and researchers who share a vision that evidence can inform education policy to the benefit of children, youth, and adults, especially educationally disadvantaged students.

Period of Commitment

The proposed District of Columbia Education Research Collaborative enthusiastically commits to partnering with the District of Columbia for at least 10 years of rigorous, independent research that supports the continuous improvement of DC schools.

The lead entity, the Urban Institute, was founded by President Lyndon Johnson in 1968 to "help solve the problem that weighs heavily on the hearts and minds of all of us—the problem of the American city and its people." Urban has called DC home for its entire history. Through deep local and regional partnerships, Urban shares and applies knowledge, elevates debates, and generates solutions that improve lives and create shared prosperity.

Urban is also a financially strong institution with the resources and staying power to honor its commitments. Urban recently completed the most fiscally successful year in its history, with over \$150 million in new funding committed by a diverse set of funders, including the federal government, state and local governments, foundations, corporations, and individuals.

Urban uses flexible resources, including unrestricted giving and endowment draws, to make strategic investments in high-priority endeavors, which include work in the Greater DC region in general and on this RPP in particular. Urban combines these internal investments with its strong record of securing funding from public and philanthropic sources to build and sustain ambitious bodies of work over the long term. Urban will draw on these financial, reputational, and strategic resources to fulfill its commitment to create a successful RPP for the District.

Consortium

Tackling the challenges facing public education in DC in collaboration with diverse community stakeholders requires more expertise, skills, and experience than any single organization can provide. The 15 organizations that make up the District of Columbia Education Research Collaborative have come together to leverage our breadth of expertise in support of student success and school improvement in the District.

The Collaborative includes academic and research organizations with expertise in quantitative and qualitative education research, as well as DC-based organizations that work directly with schools and education leaders. This combination of research expertise with deep knowledge of the community, its schools, and the challenges education leaders face will allow us to produce high-quality research that is actionable for those in the District poised to make changes that help students succeed.

To realize the benefits of a broad-based Collaborative, it is critical to have strong leadership and an organizational structure that ensures efficient collaboration among member organizations. Urban will take primary responsibility for raising funds to support core Collaborative infrastructure and research projects; ensuring all products meet standards of quality and collaboration; producing reports for funders and the city, including a public annual report; building and maintaining a website; and ensuring meaningful communication with stakeholders throughout the life of RPP projects.

Member organizations will design, plan, and staff research projects; provide technical and substantive feedback on RPP projects; translate research findings for key audiences; and support education leaders across the city in using Collaborative research to drive improvement.

In the following sections, we describe the plan for structuring the Collaborative, which draws on best practices learned from other RPPs. Our proposed model balances the need for clear leadership and management provided by staff at a single organization with the enormous benefits of drawing on education researchers and practitioners from diverse organizations.

3.1.3 Vision for the District RPP

A successful RPP for the District of Columbia will provide timely, high-quality research that is useful to policymakers, district and school leaders, teachers, parents, and others working to support improvement in public schools and ensure equitable outcomes for all DC students. The Collaborative will leverage the expertise of the DC education community and the strengths of Collaborative members in research, practice, community engagement, and capacity-building in pursuit of this vision.

The chart below demonstrates how we see the RPP working to improve outcomes in tandem with schools, the community, and the government. The Collaborative will undertake activities that result in research findings to improve policy and practice in the short term and improve outcomes for students in the long term.

Activities	Products	Expected short-term benefits	Expected long-term benefits
<p>Develop research questions based on an agenda established by the Advisory Committee</p> <p>Carry out research projects in partnership with policymakers and practitioners, and get feedback from stakeholders and the Advisory Committee on preliminary findings</p> <p>Fundraise for Collaborative activities</p> <p>Set up a data archive</p>	<p>Reports and policy briefs that answer research questions</p> <p>Testimonies before DC Council and the DC State Board of Education</p> <p>Presentations and discussions about findings with stakeholders</p> <p>Accessible research products for broad reach and usefulness</p> <p>Annual reports</p>	<p>Research aligns with shared citywide goals</p> <p>Policies are developed or refined in response to research findings</p> <p>Instructional practices reflect research findings</p> <p>New tools allow stakeholders to consume and interpret educational data and research</p>	<p>Gaps in outcomes by race or ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and English language learner status narrow</p> <p>Student growth and achievement increases</p> <p>Student attainment increases</p> <p>Student labor market outcomes improve</p>

To realize this vision of a partnership that drives short- and long-term benefits, the Collaborative will make sure all RPP work

- directly addresses priorities identified by the DC education community so it is useful to people working in schools and communities to improve student outcomes,
- is complementary to existing efforts by education agencies and other stakeholders,
- focuses on advancing educational equity, and
- leverages the expertise and independence of research partners and practice partners.

Additionally, because none of these long-term goals can be achieved without close coordination across the District's education stakeholders, collaboration will be central to our work and woven into our process from start to finish.

For example, in addition to the steps mandated by the District of Columbia Education Research Practice Partnership Establishment and Audit Act of 2018 (the RPP Act), we envision all RPP projects meeting a clear set of criteria:

- Every project the Collaborative takes on will be borne from a demonstrated community need. Researchers will not set the agenda but will work with stakeholders to develop research questions based on the needs identified by the Advisory Committee and through regular community outreach and engagement.
- Researchers will engage community stakeholders throughout the project, not just at the beginning and the end. Community, school, and government leaders will be partners in the work, and Collaborative members will seek feedback from stakeholders throughout the life of a project.
- Projects will be improvement-oriented. Members of the Collaborative will focus on improving all District educational entities by proposing possible paths for replicating promising practices and resisting calls to identify “winners” and “losers” based on research outcomes.
- Findings will be disseminated in ways that make them actionable for policymakers and educators.
- A project’s success will be measured by whether it is useful to the DC education community.

To carry out this work, the Urban Institute will provide a management structure to ensure member work meets these criteria and is coordinated, efficient, and aligned with the Advisory Committee’s agenda and the standards set out in the RPP Act.

Urban will also develop research project teams, drawing from across the Collaborative. At a minimum, project teams will include the following:

- A principal investigator, who is a senior staff member at one of the member organizations.
- One or more practitioners—such as teachers, school leaders, staff at the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE), the DC Public Charter School Board (PCSB), or DC Public Schools (DCPS)—who will work with the research team to ensure that findings will be useful to the target audience.
- A member of the core Collaborative staff at Urban, who will coordinate data accessibility and security, engagement with the Advisory Committee, communications and outreach to stakeholders, and oversight by Collaborative leadership.

Urban staff will also oversee a quality assurance process that harnesses the expertise of multiple member organizations to ensure the work is methodologically sound and accessible to multiple audiences. Researchers and practitioners will be asked to review draft products and provide feedback to improve their technical quality, clarity of communications, and relevance to policymakers and practitioners.

Independent, action-oriented research increases the capacity of education leaders in classrooms, schools, districts, and government to improve student outcomes and narrow equity gaps. We believe that with the collective expertise of member organizations and a process that ensures quality, independence, transparency, relevance, and collaboration, the Collaborative will be a critical partner to the District’s educational success.

3.1.4 Knowledge and Expertise

Expertise in Education Research for Urban School Districts and States

The 15 organizations composing the Collaborative have broad and deep experience and expertise conducting education research relevant to state education systems and urban areas, including the District of Columbia. This research is diverse in topic, disciplinary and methodological approach, and intended audience. Members' expertise spans everything from curriculum development and instruction to teacher training and program evaluation.

The examples below showcase the member organizations' range of capabilities by highlighting completed or ongoing projects that either took place in DC or are relevant to the DC policy and practice context (details and artifacts are provided in appendix B). These organizations have more experience than what we have listed below, but this list provides a taste of the expertise the Collaborative will have at its fingertips.

Qualitative and mixed-methods studies

- Howard faculty studied the prevalence of community violence and its relationship to parenting behaviors and emotional competence of preschoolers in DC by surveying parents.
- EmpowerK12 used statistical analysis to identify DC Bold Performance and Bold Improvement schools and then followed up with school site visits to identify best practices.
- Bellwether is evaluating four Charter School Program grants using mixed methods, including quasi-experimental analyses of student achievement data and site visits with observations, interviews, and focus groups.

Quantitative studies of administrative data

- EdPolicyWorks researchers analyzed DCPS data to study the effects of the IMPACT evaluation system on teacher retention and student performance and the effects of teacher turnover in DCPS on teaching quality and student achievement.
- A Brookings researcher worked with data from the RPP in New Orleans and school bus routes in that city to examine the extent to which schools are accessible to families across the city.
- Education faculty at the University of the District of Columbia (UDC) and researchers from the Center for Applied Linguistics designed, implemented, and evaluated the effects of modules that integrated science content and language on DCPS science teachers' instruction.
- Mathematica researchers used lottery data to measure the effects of attending KIPP middle schools on college enrollment.
- Urban Institute researchers have studied school segregation, including how school attendance boundaries and charter schools mitigate or exacerbate segregation.

Implementation and impact evaluations

- Howard faculty conducted an implementation study of a DCPS computer science initiative, which has reached 1,800 students and counting across all eight wards.
- Mathematica researchers are completing a three-year evaluation of the Atlanta Public Schools Turnaround Strategy, a structured approach to providing support and resources to schools with demonstrated needs.
- Georgetown researchers have evaluated early childhood education programs for the past 18 years, with a focus on the universal prekindergarten program in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Georgetown's psychology department is conducting one of the most comprehensive

contemporary longitudinal studies of public prekindergarten outcomes with more than \$5 million in funding to support RPPs with school districts.

- UDC Education faculty, in collaboration with a science education director in Atlanta Public Schools, analyzed the impact of the use of the flipped classroom model on high school students' motivation and achievement in science.

Designing and testing interventions

- Trinity and Howard faculty have partnered to develop, implement, and evaluate STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) instruction professional development at the elementary school level in DC.
- American University faculty designed and evaluated a text messaging intervention that encourages college enrollment among low-income students. In addition to a randomized controlled trial, the study included a qualitative analysis of 800,000 text message conversations, focus groups with students and school staff, and surveys of students.
- University of Maryland faculty worked with the Maryland State Department of Education to create an early childhood curriculum for 4-year-olds based on principles of project-based inquiry and driven by evidence-based practices. This curriculum is being evaluated in a 200-classroom trial this year.

Analyses of urban school systems

- The D.C. Policy Center has conducted systemwide analyses of DC's public school system, including a landscape report on the racial, ethnic, and economic diversity of schools and a report on access to schools that level the playing field for at-risk students.
- Bellwether researched school transportation in urban areas across the country, which included interviews with community members.
- UDC Education faculty published a premier reference volume on the landscape of K–12 STEM education in urban learning environments.

In-depth studies of one or more school sites

- A Trinity faculty member is leading a study of whether pairing struggling early readers with a college mentor improves learning outcomes at a DC elementary school.
- Raise DC's Postsecondary Access and Completion Change Network created a data analytics project to examine college application, enrollment, and summer melt patterns of DC high school graduates of four local education agencies (LEAs). Findings will be used to develop strategies to improve college access and completion among Change Network members.

Expertise in education and intersecting policy areas

- Health and education. Georgetown's Early Childhood Innovation Network is a local collaborative of health and education providers, community-based organizations, researchers, and advocates in DC. The network is studying the relative efficacy of an online versus in-person approach to coaching elementary school teachers in behavior management strategies.
- Nutrition and education. A faculty member at American University is leading a team of university researchers, DC school leaders, and community partners in the design, implementation, and evaluation of a program focused on teachers' health and wellness to increase their knowledge and self-efficacy regarding teaching nutrition education in their classrooms.
- Immigration and education. A current faculty member at George Washington University's Trachtenberg School studied educational achievement and attainment among children of immigrants, English language learners, and undocumented students.

The Collaborative will harness all this expertise by leveraging Urban’s experience managing complex education research projects that involve coordinating with multiple partner organizations to collect and analyze quantitative and qualitative data (including administrative databases, surveys, interviews, and focus groups). The following areas of expertise will be particularly beneficial to the RPP:

Coordinating multiple research teams. For a set of studies on student transportation in choice-rich urban education systems, Urban Institute researchers accessed data from DCPS and PCSB and worked with teams that had access to similar data from Denver, Detroit, New Orleans, and New York City. Urban produced a multicity report that provided comparative results for all five cities, helping policymakers understand similarities and differences in findings across contexts. Urban also published a series of deep dives into each city’s data and a multicity qualitative report that drew on interviews with policymakers and practitioners. Convening and managing multiple teams of researchers as well as publishing and disseminating findings produced by these teams is similar to the role Urban will play as the Collaborative’s lead entity.

Managing research projects with large-scale administrative databases. The student transportation study is just one example of how Urban has managed research projects with multiple student-level administrative databases. For a study measuring high school quality using metrics beyond test scores, Urban researchers assembled statewide longitudinal data from Kentucky, Massachusetts, and Virginia. Urban has also worked with the Florida Department of Education to merge records from their data warehouse to college enrollment and graduation data from the National Student Clearinghouse for a study of the long-term effects of a private school scholarship program. Urban will draw on this experience as the Collaborative builds, maintains, and manages the data archive for the RPP.

Collecting original data. Urban is experienced in collecting original quantitative and qualitative data, an activity we expect the RPP will undertake. To help stakeholders better understand DC school data, Urban partnered with the D.C. Policy Center to create a longitudinal dataset that puts several school-level datasets in one accessible place. And as the DC Promise Neighborhood Initiative’s local evaluation partner, Urban designed, organized, and administered school climate surveys in DC public charter schools in 2013, 2015, and 2017.

Community engaged research. As a pioneer of community engaged research, a methodology that includes the input, participation, and reflections of the people and communities at the heart of the issues studied, Urban regularly engages diverse stakeholders in soliciting and developing research questions. Methods of engagement range from seeking feedback at community meetings to hosting data walks, which connect the community directly with relevant research and data and give researchers and community members space to reflect on lessons learned and next steps. Examples include Urban’s work with DC youth in public housing communities on the Promoting Adolescent Sexual Health and Safety project and engagement with residents as part of the 11th Street Bridge project, both detailed in appendix B.

Urban’s experience leading complex projects with multiple partners is in addition to its substantive expertise, which spans from prekindergarten to postsecondary education. Urban researchers have conducted quantitative and qualitative studies on such topics as student transportation, school funding, teacher diversity, and school segregation. Additional detail on Urban’s expertise and experience (including lessons learned, artifacts, time frames, and dates) is included in appendix B.

Expertise in Partnering with Government

Collaborative member organizations have a long history of working on research with and for government partners, including the District of Columbia.

Urban, the Collaborative's coordinating entity, has worked with DCPS, OSSE, and the Office of the DC Auditor on education projects for more than a decade. Projects include the following:

- When DC officials were making decisions about closing elementary schools and redefining enrollment boundaries, Urban helped develop and apply criteria for deciding which schools to close and analyzed potential effects on travel distances for students and enrollment by school. In 2008, DCPS contracted the Urban Institute, the 21st Century School Fund, and the Brookings Institution to provide an enrollment analysis and grade-level projections for DCPS schools for the 2009–10 school year. The study examined the result of school closings and grade configuration changes on DCPS enrollment and provided recommendations for future enrollment studies. More recently, Urban worked with DCPS to document the prevalence and patterns of absenteeism in early childhood education programs and identify how these patterns vary across students, families, and schools.
- Urban has also supported the District's efforts to understand and improve the process of estimating enrollment by school and by grade in DCPS and public charter schools. As a subcontractor on a study commissioned by the Office of the DC Auditor in 2018, Urban designed and carried out analyses to assess the accuracy of existing projections, measured year-to-year student mobility, and identified factors associated with inaccurate enrollment projections.
- Urban has partnered with OSSE on Project ASQC: Access to a Supply of Quality Care, the District's first federal child care research partnership grant. The project, launched in September 2019 and developed collaboratively with OSSE, uses multiple methods and data sources to examine the supply and distribution of high-quality child care following the 2018 implementation of Capital Quality, a redesigned quality rating and improvement system.

Some of these projects involved collaboration at all stages of the research process, from identifying research questions to disseminating findings and developing new policies and programs. Others have called for collaboration on specific aspects of the research process.

Below, we describe Collaborative members' expertise collaborating with government and offer illustrations of engagement at various stages of the research process. Additional details on these and other examples of collaborations with government are available in appendix C.

Development of research questions. Collaborative members have experience convening stakeholder groups, connecting challenges of practice with previous research questions and existing research evidence, and using knowledge of the literature to support practitioner discussions about needed evidence.

- EdPolicyWorks collaborates with DCPS to jointly determine research questions that are refreshed annually to reflect DCPS needs.
- University of Maryland researchers worked with DCPS curriculum specialists to develop a fourth-grade mathematics curriculum for computational thinking.
- The D.C. Policy Center worked with the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education and partners across the DC government to identify the scope of the Out of School Time (OST)

project and collect quantitative and qualitative data on the present capacity of OST programs, providing the first comprehensive portrait of how these programs are funded.

- Urban convened government officials and researchers in 2015 to explore opportunities for improving population and school projections before contributing to the enrollment projections study in 2017–18.

Communication throughout the project. Collaborative members establish plans for communicating with government partners about research progress. Expectations for communication are typically established at the project's onset and may involve written progress reports, phone check-ins, or in-person briefings. Results are shared in formats that meet stakeholders' needs (described in the community outreach section).

- In their collaboration with DCPS, University of Maryland researchers have weekly meetings with DCPS curriculum specialists. The researchers also spend a week at DCPS central offices over the summer working on this project.
- American University staff serve on the State Title III Advisory Committee for OSSE. The work aims to help OSSE make decisions about policies for English language learners. The work is done collaboratively via face-to-face monthly meetings that include whole-group discussions, small-group discussions, and surveys.
- On Project ASQC, Urban maintains communication based on partner preferences. Urban and partners in OSSE's Division of Early Learning agreed on a quarterly meeting schedule and have email and phone check-ins as needed.

Adjusting the course of the project in response to stakeholder feedback. Government partners are experts on their programs and policies. Collaborative members seek input from government partners, listen to their feedback, and identify ways to integrate it into the research. Our teams have a record of providing government partners with opportunities to discuss and provide feedback on all aspects of the research process. Project timelines are designed to allow partners to review interim deliverables and provide input.

- In developing the OST reports, D.C. Policy Center gathered feedback from government stakeholders on multiple drafts of written reports to ensure that the structure and presentation of the findings were most useful to audience needs. Based on feedback, they created additional infographics and summary documents.
- The EdPolicyWorks team, in its partnership with DCPS, regularly shares analysis and findings. The team welcomes feedback from DCPS but retains control over the analysis, findings, and interpretation. The team also shares intermediate products such as preliminary results with DCPS staff to build their understanding and solicit their feedback.
- As part of a project with Prince George's County, Urban conducted a program review to collect information about the programs and services offered to students as part of the TNI@School initiative. After collecting and summarizing data on the schools, program offerings, and school staff perspectives, TNI@School leadership did not feel they had what they needed to understand the initiative. They requested evidence on the program offerings. Although this was not part of the project's original scope, Urban Institute researchers modified the project plan to address their feedback. The program review was expanded to include research evidence for each program offering.

Ensuring work is useful to the partner and intentionally building capacity. Collaborative members have a strong record of conducting research and communicating useful lessons to government partners.

- Raise DC organized the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education, OSSE, DCPS, PCSB, and individual public charter schools to work on the 2014 Graduation Pathways Report. Raise DC also catalyzed leaders to launch and expand a cross-LEA Bridge to High School Data Exchange, a standardized process for ensuring essential early warning information is transferred quickly, automatically, and consistently as students enroll in ninth grade.
- EmpowerK12 worked with seven public charter school LEAs to support their transition from the DC Comprehensive Assessment System to tests from the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers. EmpowerK12 developed analytic tools to align the tests and assess changes in student proficiency. EmpowerK12 provided trainings on the tool to data managers, assessment coordinators, and PCSB staff to enhance their capacity.
- Through its work on teacher value-added models, Mathematica produced public reports documenting its approach and provided DCPS with the programming code used to develop the models, building the agency's capacity to conduct analysis independently. Mathematica also provided technical assistance to DCPS and OSSE, including regular phone calls to answer questions about using and understanding the effectiveness measures and how to best use them in a multiple-measure evaluation system.
- Bellwether worked with OSSE to operationalize its strategic plan, ensuring that short- and medium-term goals, activities, and milestones for each division were aligned with agencywide goals and long-term student outcomes targets, work already begun through the Every Student Succeeds Act state plan. Bellwether provided an implementation road map, with timeline and sequencing, success metrics, and detailed initiative work plans for each priority initiative.

Plan to Leverage Best Practices of RPPs

This proposal is grounded in best practices and lessons learned from RPPs in states and cities around the country, such as Baltimore, Chicago, Tennessee, Houston, New Orleans, New York City, and San Francisco. Based on conversations with RPP leaders and a review of the burgeoning research literature on RPPs, our approach was designed to address the challenges other RPPs have faced and leverage lessons about what has worked well.

Several RPP leaders we consulted for this proposal agreed to be advisers to the Collaborative if our proposal is selected. These advisers include Jenny Nagaoka (deputy director, UChicago Consortium on School Research), Doug Harris (founding director, Education Research Alliance for New Orleans), Erin O'Hara (executive director, Tennessee Education Research Alliance), and Laura Wentworth (director, Stanford University/San Francisco Unified School District Partnership).

Conversations with these and other RPP leaders have demonstrated the importance of having a clear definition of what an RPP is and how RPP work is different from other kinds of education research or public-private partnerships. In a 2013 framing paper on RPPs, Coburn, Penuel, and Geil define RPPs at the district level as "long-term, mutualistic collaborations between practitioners and researchers that are intentionally organized to investigate problems of practice and solutions for improving district outcomes."¹

¹ Cynthia E. Coburn, William R. Penuel, and Kimberly E. Geil, *A Strategy for Leveraging Research for Educational Improvement in School Districts* (New York: William T. Grant Foundation, 2013).

The authors identify five distinguishing features of successful RPPs that are reflected in our proposal:

1. Commit to the long term. Urban commits to facilitating the Collaborative for at least 10 years.
2. Focus on problems of practice. The notice of invitation makes clear the RPP will focus on increasing student outcomes and school improvement (e.g., identifying effective instructional practices and interventions), and our proposal includes mechanisms to ensure practitioners are key collaborators at all stages of the research process (in addition to the Advisory Committee's role in setting the research agenda).
3. Commit to mutualism. Our commitment to addressing problems of practice and our proposed organizational structure (including a Leadership Council representing the Collaborative members) will ensure the RPP's work benefits practitioners and is worthwhile for researchers.
4. Use intentional strategies to foster partnership. The structural elements of the RPP laid out by the RPP Act and OSSE's notice of invitation, as well as our proposed structure, are all oriented toward fostering partnership among researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and the broader community.
5. Produce original analyses. The RPP aims not only to make data and syntheses of existing research available to District stakeholders but to conduct original analyses and provide novel tools to inform local decisionmaking.

Taken together, these features ensure that, in the words of Penuel and Hill's introduction to a 2019 collection of academic papers on RPPs, "the questions center not on advancing knowledge and theory for its own sake but on practice; that is, the research focuses on how to improve intermediate and long-term outcomes for students, their families, and their communities."²

The strategies and tactics employed to reach these goals will need to be tailored to DC's unique context, but the leaders of Chicago's RPP (the UChicago Consortium on School Research) identify five "critical commitments" that guide their work.³ All five are reflected in our proposal and are commitments that we will hold ourselves accountable to:

1. "developing an extensive data archive on [Chicago Public Schools],
2. extensive stakeholder engagement and strong ongoing relationships with the district,
3. conducting scientifically rigorous research while making findings broadly accessible,
4. building knowledge of core problems across time and across studies, and
5. an extensive outreach of providing information to the public."

Most RPPs are partnerships between one or more research institutions and a single school district. DC's context as both a city and a state with one large traditional district and more than 60 charter LEAs is unlike any other in the country. Our proposal to bring together 15 research and practice organizations from across the region is also unique. As a result, we will draw on lessons learned from multiple contexts that share elements of the DC context, including these:

- The Tennessee Education Research Alliance is a state-level RPP that informs policy and practice in LEAs across the state.
- The Education Research Alliance for New Orleans works with data shared by the state government to inform educational improvement in New Orleans' all-charter school system.

² William R. Penuel and Heather C. Hill, "Building a Knowledge Base on Research-Practice Partnerships: Introduction to the Special Topic Collection," *AERA Open*.

³ Melissa Roderick, John Q. Easton, and Penny Bender Sebring, *The Consortium on Chicago School Research: A New Model for the Role of Research in Supporting Urban School Reform* (Chicago: Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago, 2009).

- The RPP between the San Francisco Unified School District and Stanford University is led by a “broker” who splits her time between the district office and Stanford and connects practitioners with researchers from across the university. In our proposed model, Urban staff will play the role of “broker” and “matchmaker” between researchers and practitioners.
- The Baltimore Education Research Consortium (BERC) is a partnership between the Baltimore City Public Schools and universities in and around Baltimore. Our Collaborative’s Leadership Council is modeled after BERC’s Deans Board, which includes representatives from partner universities.

Our proposal is also informed by lessons learned from prior efforts to create an RPP in DC. In 2013, a local university and group of contract research firms formed the Education Consortium on Research and Evaluation (EdCORE). The effort produced a useful series of research reports aimed at evaluating the District’s Public Education Reform Amendment Act of 2007 but went dormant shortly thereafter. Conversations with people involved with this effort raised two key challenges we have addressed in our proposal.

First, EdCORE was created to use funding provided by the city council to evaluate the Public Education Reform Amendment Act, which weakened the consortium’s perceived independence and set an initial direction that was not aimed at informing practice. Our proposal is in response to legislation agreed to by the city council and the mayor to work in collaboration with education agencies rather than to evaluate a single policy or set of policies, and we propose to start the RPP with funding from several philanthropic sources, enabling us to establish the RPP’s independence.

Second, EdCORE members struggled to work collaboratively, often because they were competing for the same government contracts. Our Collaborative includes a broader set of entities and an operational plan that sets out clear guidance for both the leadership and management roles held by Urban staff and the research and practice roles of the other 14 member organizations. Our members will collaborate on research that grows out of the RPP. Contract work conducted in response to requests for proposals from the city government will not be part of the RPP.

The Collaborative will continuously improve in response to facts on the ground. We will continue to draw from the rich set of resources made available by such organizations as the National Network of Education Research Practice Partnerships (NNERPP), the William T. Grant Foundation, and the National Center for Research in Policy and Practice. In addition to leveraging existing relationships with RPP leaders around the country, we will also continue to build new ones through membership in NNERPP and participation in its annual conference.

By learning from prior RPPs, DC’s RPP will be positioned to succeed in our mission to inform educational improvement in the District and to contribute lessons learned from our context back to the broader RPP community.

Philosophy

Engaging a wide range of stakeholders in a project's design, implementation, and analysis is critical to effectively address local needs and challenges. We believe that deeply engaging communities in the research process will foster culturally relevant research; lead to the creation of more effective programs, services, and policies; and empower the community. With this philosophy in mind, the Collaborative's work will be rooted in five key principles we believe are foundational to a successful RPP:

- *Collaboration.* The members of the Collaborative must work with each other and with stakeholders in the District to ensure the work draws on diverse expertise from across the city.
- *Independence.* Independent researchers bring the objectivity of a third party and have credibility with the wider community because they follow the data, wherever they might lead. The Collaborative research partners strive to be trusted, honest brokers of data and information about which programs and policies are closing outcome gaps.
- *Research integrity and quality.* The Collaborative must ensure data are high quality, research methods are appropriate and transparent, and findings are communicated clearly and even-handedly.
- *Relevance.* Research must be relevant to and actionable for local decisionmakers, including parents, teachers, school leaders, district leaders, and elected officials.
- *Transparency.* Research findings will always be made publicly available, and the Collaborative will strive to make data and methods publicly available when doing so does not risk the confidentiality of student records.

These principles are based on lessons learned from RPPs in other cities and states, as well as RPPs and community- and government-engaged work Collaborative members have been a part of.

One example of such work is Project ASQC, described in the section on partnering with government and in appendix C. From the start, this project has been developed hand in hand with OSSE. Key contacts from OSSE provided Urban researchers with information on what they needed to learn, and based on those needs, Urban researchers scoped out a project that was refined in close collaboration with OSSE staff.

Through a partnership with the US Department of Education, Urban helps communities in the Promise Neighborhoods program meet their data collection and program implementation goals. Promise Neighborhoods are communities that receive five-year, \$20 million grants to achieve academic, health, and social outcomes for children through strong schools and supportive services. As a technical assistance provider, Urban works closely with Promise Neighborhood communities to understand their needs and create trainings, conferences, and assessments that support community goals. All five principles listed above are central to making this effort successful.

The Collaborative's approach has also been informed by RPP experience outside of education. Members of Urban's justice policy team recently partnered with the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice to evaluate aggression management programs for youth in a Virginia correctional facility. The project generated insights on the opportunities and challenges of RPPs. Researchers concluded that ensuring research questions are interesting to both parties, embracing differences between researchers and practitioners, and remaining adaptable in goals and methods are keys to success.

These experiences and others, along with what we have learned from other RPP leaders and from Collaborative members, will provide a foundation for the RPP, and the principles will guide us in setting up and running the RPP. The structures we will use to bring this philosophy to life are outlined in the Vision and Consortium Coordination sections.

Networks

Collaborative member organizations have a broad array of partners throughout the DC region that can enhance the Collaborative's work. The Collaborative will tap its networks, partners, and partners' networks to support various aspects of the RPP's work, including research question development, data collection, data validation or "ground truthing," and dissemination to key stakeholders.

In addition, many Collaborative members' work links them to networks of students, school leaders, current and prospective teachers, and policymakers:

- Raise DC is an education partnership representing more than 250 cross-sector organizations, agencies, nonprofits, and schools. Its Change Networks and Leadership Council can be leveraged to discuss preliminary findings, vet potential strategies, or share final reports or products. In its work on continuous improvement, EmpowerK12 has developed relationships with the District's education stakeholders, including several charter LEAs. And D.C. Policy Center is carrying out workshops with school leaders from across the District to gather ideas for how research topics and the research processes can best benefit schools as the primary practice partner.
- Our university partners educate DC public school graduates and future teachers and have a unique opportunity to make our work more useful to postsecondary educators. The University of the District of Columbia and Trinity Washington University enroll more DC public school students than any other postsecondary institutions, with experience and data to not only study but implement interventions to enhance student success.
- Urban is home to Measure4Change, a program that delivers performance measurement training to District nonprofits. The support helps nonprofits better understand how they are helping their constituencies and how they might do better. Today, the Measure4Change learning community includes 66 Washington-area nonprofits, half of which are education organizations.

The Collaborative is also well positioned to partner with other organizations whose networks could support data collection, validation, and dissemination efforts. We have discussed the RPP with Parents Amplifying Voices in Education (PAVE), EmpowerEd, and the Data Quality Campaign, which are interested in supporting the RPP.

Our Collaborative will continue to identify and engage new partners to further the goals of the research agenda once it has been established. In a research project's development stage, we will ask collaborators to identify organizations and networks that would bring additional insight or value to the partnership. We will leverage our existing networks and the networks of our partners and the Advisory Committee. We will also create mechanisms for potential partners to reach out to us if they are interested in partnering or collaborating on research projects.

Expertise in Coordinating and Conducting Community Outreach

The Collaborative member organizations bring a wealth of expertise in engaging and communicating with various stakeholders, which we will supplement with the expertise and experience of members of the Advisory Committee and other education stakeholders to ensure we are reaching the right people at the right stages of the process.

Urban has particular strengths in engaging the community in the research process (as described in the section on research expertise), translating complex research into accessible products disseminated through various channels, and convening stakeholders at all levels.

Urban's in-house communications team spans strategic communications, data visualization, creative design, digital engagement, web development, media relations, events management, writing, and stakeholder outreach. Members of the communications and outreach team work with researchers to employ different communications channels based on each project's target audience and goal. Examples of outreach channels Urban has pursued and could employ in the RPP include the following:

- Targeted email outreach can be used to reach key stakeholders directly, ensuring they are up to date on the latest findings and have access to the researchers.
- Data visualization can help translate research findings into accessible charts, illustrations, or stories that help a broader audience connect to the research. Urban's student transportation project, for example, told the stories of two DC students whose daily commutes to school affected their lives, presenting District-wide data along the way. The data visualization provided a platform to elevate this important issue.
- Presentations and outreach to state or local policymakers can help changemakers understand how a key research finding affects their local context. Urban Institute researchers regularly engage directly with policymakers and translate findings into memos, fact sheets, or presentations that highlight relevant results. For example, a researcher recently testified before Indiana and Oregon state legislative committees about the effects of changing the way states measure student poverty.
- Facilitated, in-person convenings can bring together business leaders, nonprofit leaders, practitioners, policymakers, and community members for conversations aimed at solving specific challenges. Urban's Research to Action Lab is skilled in planning and coordinating these convenings, which often lead directly to action, as in one roundtable on housing and child well-being that resulted in the creation of Health Starts at Home, a program that brings together housing and health care stakeholders to demonstrate the impact of stable housing on children's health.

The Collaborative's communications and outreach expertise spans beyond Urban. Member organizations have particular expertise in the following activities:

- Engaging educators, as demonstrated by D.C. Policy Center's workshops with school leaders to generate ideas for research topics, the Howard School of Education's Urban Superintendents Academy, and Georgetown's master's program in educational transformation.
- Engaging families and students, as in EmpowerK12's work with parents and Howard University's Verizon Innovative Learning program, which engages middle school young men of color in a hands-on enrichment program.

- Translating findings for practitioners and policymakers, as in Raise DC’s Early Development Instrument, a website tailored for school-based leaders and community centers that has been presented to two dozen groups across DC, and the workshops for DCPS research and evaluation staff run by the Georgetown Department of Psychology’s Center for Research on Children in the US.

More details on these and other examples are available in appendix D.

In shaping, communicating, and translating RPP research, the Collaborate will draw on the capacities of the Urban Institute’s communications staff, the local expertise and networks of its members, and the guidance of the Advisory Committee in determining the best way to engage diverse audiences to ensure the most impact.

3.1.5 Partnership Personnel and Collaboration

Current Personnel

The Urban Institute’s current staffing level is 548 employees (an organizational chart is included in appendix E). Urban’s staff include approximately 27 full-time equivalent positions devoted to conducting research in education.

Urban strives to attract and support a diversity of backgrounds, experiences, talents, and thought. Likewise, Urban thinks intentionally about how it can learn from and speak to audiences that reflect the rich diversity of America’s communities, and the organization strives to foster a culture where employees from different backgrounds and perspectives enjoy mutual respect, inclusivity, and collegiality. These efforts are critical to the health, vibrancy, and relevance of the institution and to the excellence of its research.

We have not attempted to calculate the staffing levels of the 14 other member organizations, but we conservatively estimate that they collectively employ more than 100 people who conduct education research.

Personnel Dedicated to the Partnership

The Collaborative will be led by an executive director and management team, based at the Urban Institute. The executive director will represent the Collaborative in interactions with the Advisory Committee and city agencies, hire staff, chair the Leadership Council, and guide the Collaborative’s overall direction. The executive director will be hired as an employee of the Urban Institute and will be dedicated full time to the RPP. Key considerations when hiring an executive director and other core staff will include relevant background and expertise (e.g., in education research, policy, practice, or community engagement), diversity, and knowledge of and commitment to the District’s public schools.

Until the executive director is hired, the Collaborative will be led by Matthew Chingos of the Urban Institute. As the vice president for education data and policy, Chingos has overseen the reintroduction of Urban’s education program, building a team of 15 people in three years.

Initial work to build the RPP will be supported by Urban Institute researchers, data science staff, and communications staff, until full-time RPP staff are hired. Throughout the life of the RPP, staff will only bill time spent on RPP projects to RPP funding sources.

The exact set of Urban-based core staff will be determined by the executive director, in consultation with the Leadership Council and based on available funding. Core management functions, to be performed either by current Urban staff or eventual RPP staff hired by the executive director, include the following:

- Research direction. Research design, management of research teams, and quality control
- Program management. Coordination, internal communication, and development
- Data management. Creation and maintenance of a data archive and data-sharing agreements
- Outreach management. Communication with community stakeholders, coordination with practice partners to help stakeholders translate research into practice, and media relations
- Business operations. Subcontracting and financial management

In addition to the core management staff, the RPP will be supported by researchers and practitioners from all the member organizations, including Urban. Researchers and practitioners will remain employees of their organizations, contributing to the RPP as project needs dictate and as funding allows. Some researchers will work full time on RPP projects, and others will work on a mix of RPP projects and other work.

The CVs of key personnel from all Collaborative member organizations are included in appendix F.

Advisory Committee Collaboration

The Advisory Committee is critical to the RPP's success. We expect Advisory Committee members will represent every education stakeholder group (e.g., parents, teachers, principals, district policymakers, operations staff, and other stakeholders) and bring a wide range of expertise and experiences. Such diversity often brings differing views of research priorities and interpretation of research results.

Our goal is to support the Advisory Committee as it navigates differences, develops a research agenda that represents the education community's needs, and provides feedback on RPP projects and products. We will offer to support Advisory Committee members in the following ways:

- Coordinating meeting logistics, including scheduling meetings, creating agendas, taking notes, providing refreshments, and securing suitable meeting space at locations across the District.
- Connecting Advisory Committee members to RPP leaders around the country so they can learn about the best practices of similar bodies, such as the Chicago Consortium's Steering Committee.
- Hosting informational sessions on research best practices and the current DC educational data landscape. Topics could include the latest national education research, research design principles, statistical terminology, predictive modeling, or an overview of DC student outcomes, OSSE data systems, and additional data collections happening in schools. When all members have the same baseline understanding of leading methods and current DC data, they will be more likely to come to consensus on research priorities.
- Providing one-on-one support to members so they have access to the best possible background data in DC and the latest national research to inform presentations they make to the rest of the Advisory Committee.

- Providing monthly updates on our research efforts and access to embargoed reports early and often for Committee member feedback. We will set clear expectations about the need to keep preliminary findings confidential before public release to facilitate the level of trust needed.
- Holding “train the trainer” sessions that give committee members the confidence they need to support their community’s stakeholders in understanding and translating the work into continuous improvement action steps as appropriate for their stakeholder group. Members will have access to additional materials and guidance to facilitate this process.

The Advisory Committee will set its own rules for determining the research agenda and providing feedback on draft RPP products. The Collaborative will prioritize agenda items and feedback from the Committee that reflects the consensus view of the Committee members.

We will measure the success of our engagement with the Advisory Committee based on feedback surveys sent to Committee members, attendance at Committee meetings, and the level of engagement of Committee members in providing feedback on and helping disseminate RPP products.

Consortium Coordination

The consortium will be led by a management team at the Urban Institute, with strategic guidance provided by a Leadership Council consisting of one representative from each member organization. Specific roles and responsibilities are described below.

Urban Institute:

- Provide executive leadership by hiring an executive director to lead the Collaborative and overseeing his or her performance
- Raise funds to support both the core Collaborative infrastructure at Urban as well as research activities by both Urban and the Collaborative members
- Manage grant agreements and contracts with Collaborative funders and subgrants and subcontracts to Collaborative members
- Build and maintain a data archive and share data with research teams (the Collaborative will enter into data-sharing agreements with OSSE and LEAs that will be updated regularly to provide approval for specific projects)
- Produce reports to funders and the city, including the legislatively mandated annual report
- Manage the Collaborative’s communications activities, including building and maintaining a website
- Represent the Collaborative in interactions with the Advisory Committee and city education agencies

Collaborative Members:

All Collaborative members will provide input on research priorities and the Collaborative’s overall direction through participation at regular Leadership Council meetings.

The 15 members of the Collaborative include organizations with experience and expertise in education research and practice. The roles of individual organizations will vary based on the expertise of available staff in each organization and the RPP’s needs.

Research roles:

- Design, plan, and staff research projects that align with the Collaborative’s approach
- Author or coauthor reports, briefs, and other research products
- Present findings to stakeholders
- Provide technical and substantive feedback on draft RPP project findings and products
- Raise funds for RPP projects on which the member would be the lead organization

Practice roles:

- Support research members in designing and conducting research projects with community stakeholders
- Translate research findings for key audiences
- Participate in activities that support education leaders across the city in using outcomes from RPP projects to drive educational decisions and continuous improvement
- Provide substantive feedback on draft RPP project findings and products
- Provide training and support to practitioners

Leadership Council:

- Provide input on research priorities and recommend potential research projects to the executive director
- Provide a forum for member organizations to represent their organizational interests and constructively resolve any issues that arise
- Make decisions about routines, norms, and expectations for the Council, including the frequency and location of meetings and the possible creation of an executive committee that would meet more frequently and work more closely with the executive director
- Receive regular updates from, and provide advice to, the executive director on the RPP’s strategic direction, progress of research projects, dissemination activities, community engagement, and finances
- Help recruit candidates for the executive director position by suggesting names and providing feedback to Urban on potential candidates
- Provide feedback on the annual Collaborative budget and financial sustainability plan
- Consider applications from additional organizations that seek to join the Collaborative (if our proposal is selected, we will invite organizations that also submitted proposals to join the Collaborative)

Documentation of organizations’ commitments to the Collaborative are available in appendix G.

3.1.6 Data Use and Protection and Research Methods

Expertise in Data Security

Urban has a long history of securely collecting, maintaining, storing, and using sensitive individual-level data on education and other topics from DC and education agencies around the country. Urban has always complied with all relevant federal, state, and local laws and regulations.

Sensitive datasets that Urban researchers have worked with include the following:

- Multiple years of student-level data from DC education agencies and LEAs, including OSSE, DCPS, PCSB, and My School DC

- Statewide student-level longitudinal data on millions of students from multiple states, including Connecticut, Florida, Kentucky, Massachusetts, North Carolina, and Virginia
- Nationally representative restricted-use datasets maintained by the National Center for Education Statistics of the US Department of Education and made available to researchers under strict data-use agreements

Additional examples of Urban’s experience with sensitive data include the following:

- Multiple years of DC birth certificate, death certificate, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program data as part of NeighborhoodInfo DC, now Urban-Greater DC
- Individual-level data, including birth date, Social Security number, name, and other personally identifiable information from the US Marshals Service, the Executive Office for US Attorneys, the US Probation and Pretrial Services System, the Administrative Office of the US Courts, the US Sentencing Commission, and the Bureau of Prisons as part of the Federal Justice Statistics Program
- Vital records information from DC, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, and Nevada and individual-level Medicaid eligibility and claims from DC, Alabama, Florida, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania for use in the Strong Start for Mothers and Newborns initiative
- Individual-level data on 5 million American consumers provided by one of the major credit bureaus

Sensitive data are stored on secure, encrypted drives and transferred using secure means, subject to the security plan described below.

Collaborative members also have significant expertise securing sensitive student-level education data. This expertise is described in appendix H.

Data Management and Security Plan

Following the model pioneered by the Chicago Consortium and legislated by the RPP Act, the Collaborative will build a data archive to support RPP projects through the following steps:

- Urban will enter into a master research services agreement with the District that lays out the RPP’s general terms, including requirements for data security and a list of all organizations and individuals (at Urban and the other member organizations) that may have access to confidential data in the future (pursuant to additional terms set by memorandums of understanding, or MOUs), as well as the process for modifying that list in the future.
- After the Advisory Committee has provided feedback on the first project or set of projects, Urban will enter into an MOU with OSSE (and other relevant agencies or LEAs, as needed) to obtain data to complete those projects. The approved projects and data elements will be clearly described in the initial MOU. The MOU will last for no more than five years and will require the data to be destroyed upon the agreement’s expiration (as required by federal law). But the expiration date can be extended by mutual agreement of the parties.
- Future projects will update the initial MOU with an amendment that specifies the new projects, previously provided data elements that will be used for those projects, and any additional data elements (or years of data) that are needed.
- The initial MOU and all subsequent updates to the MOU will specify which researchers (and at which organizations) will access confidential data for a particular project.

- Urban’s data archive will separate data by source so data can be destroyed when required by a provider, although our expectation is that MOUs will be extended to support additional projects with the same data.

The data archive will be stored on secure Urban servers, exchanged via secure means, and subject to Urban’s procedures for protecting confidential data. These procedures are detailed in appendix H, and include the following:

- Urban maintains confidential disks separate from nonconfidential disks on all its system servers. Confidential data are stored on the confidential disks and not backed up in Urban’s normal system backups.
- Staff who have confidential data access are required to have PGP full disk encryption with Federal Information Processing Standard 140-2-level protection.
- The acceptable methods for the disposal or “scrubbing” of confidential storage media include returning the media to the source, physical destruction, or erasure using a secure erasure product.
- A Checkpoint firewall cluster monitors and evaluates all attempted connections from the Internet to Urban’s public web servers and private network. A managed security service monitors the network via sensors, agents, and log collection to provide 24/7 security. Up-to-date Symantec and Microsoft Defender antivirus software runs on desktop PCs and servers.
- All projects’ use of confidential human subject data must be approved by the Urban Institute’s Institutional Review Board (IRB), adhering to the IRB data security guidelines, and data security plans for any kind of confidential data are reviewed by Urban’s information technology security officer.
- Secure transfer of confidential data between any and all parties, to include one of the following (and subject to the data providers’ policies and preferences):
 - File transfer over secure electronic connections. This means the source system must be a trusted and recognized source for the data, and the means of transfer must be secure, such as an encrypted internet connection to the Urban Institute. Urban maintains a secure FTP server where external parties can exchange data with Urban through encrypted connections.
 - Delivery by secure, trackable means, such as FedEx, UPS, or registered US mail.
 - Hand delivery by a cleared individual.

Subsets of information from the data archive will be made available to research teams that are specific to the scope of a project. Research projects carried out by Urban staff will use the same data security procedures outlined above. Research projects carried out by other Collaborative members will follow parallel procedures that ensure an equally high level of data security, including the following:

- Store confidential data only on encrypted disks.
- When exchanging data, follow secure transfer protocols.
- Use computer systems that meet industry standards for data security.
- Obtain IRB approval.
- Receive access only to data elements needed for a particular project, and destroy all confidential data upon project completion using one of the acceptable methods listed above.
- Comply with any other terms specified by the MOU with the data provider.

Only Collaborative members who can meet these standards will be able to access student-level data. Collaborative members who do not meet these standards can still participate in research projects that use confidential data but cannot access the data themselves.

Urban will also establish procedures for the collection and security of data the Collaborative collects directly from surveys, focus groups, observations, and interviews with students, families, and school staff.

Validity

The Urban Institute, as required by title 45, part 46 of the Code of Federal Regulations, has an established Institutional Review Board to ensure its research practices and procedures protect the rights and welfare of human subjects. The Urban Institute IRB has obtained an assurance of compliance approved by the Office of Human Research Protections of the US Department of Health and Human Services. Urban's policy, entitled "Research Involving Human Subjects," acknowledges Urban's ethical responsibilities in research involving human subjects and requires that all such research be subject to this policy and the Code of Federal Regulations.

The Collaborative leadership team at Urban will ensure all RPP projects involving human subjects research receive IRB approval, either from Urban's IRB or by an IRB associated with one of the member organizations. In particular, all projects for which student-level data are accessed or students are observed or interviewed must receive IRB approval. Urban will also conduct a disclosure review of all RPP products before public release to ensure student data privacy and confidentiality are protected.

IRB approval and oversight focus on ensuring the rights of human subjects are protected and research is conducted ethically. The Collaborative will also have a robust quality assurance process to ensure the validity of research methods and outcomes. Researchers from across the member organizations will serve on technical review panels (supplemented by other experts, as needed), with reviewers matched to projects in their area of substantive or methodological expertise. All RPP projects will be reviewed at two key stages by at least two researchers unaffiliated with the project:

- Proposed research projects will be reviewed for the technical quality of the proposed methods before they are shared with the Advisory Committee for feedback. The RPP's research director will determine whether reviewers' concerns have been satisfactorily met and the project is ready to be shared with the Advisory Committee.
- Draft research products will be reviewed for the technical quality of the research methods used and the appropriate interpretation of study outcomes before products are finalized for publication. The RPP's research director will determine whether reviewers' concerns have been satisfactorily met before products are released to the public.
- Technical reviewers will be available to provide advice and feedback on preliminary products between the beginning and end of the project.

This model is based on best practices from other RPPs. For example, the Baltimore Education Research Consortium has a research board, composed of one faculty member from each participating university, which maintains a quality-control process for the consortium's work.

The Collaborative will set standards for researchers and reviewers to use, drawing from existing resources such as the What Works Clearinghouse standards, Every Student Succeeds Act evidence tiers, Social Science Data Editors guidance on creating replicable data and program archives, and American Economic Association policies on data and code availability. We will strive to be at the forefront of data quality and reproducibility.

Though it is common to receive questions about research methods, particularly when the findings are controversial, Urban's careful review process, which includes review by an outside expert, ensures that methods align with best practices in the field. Urban also explains methods and other decisions, so readers can understand why a particular approach was chosen and how any limitations in data availability or quality were addressed. The Collaborative will take this same transparent approach.

Data Quality

The quality assurance process managed by the research director and implemented by researchers from the member organizations will ensure statistical analyses meet high standards of technical quality by reviewing proposed statistical methods at the start of projects and their execution at (or before) the end of projects. Urban's internal Statistical Methods Group will be a resource for Collaborative researchers.

In addition to submitting projects for technical review, principal investigators will be required to run a code check on all statistical analyses before publication. Through this process, a researcher not affiliated with a project carefully checks the statistical programming code to identify any errors or other anomalies. The Collaborative will develop a robust code check procedure, drawing on the procedures currently employed by Urban's Center on Education Data and Policy and the Urban-wide quality assurance process (both of which are included in appendix I).

Ensuring that data are of high quality—and that any limitations are understood by researchers and users of research findings—is critical. Our approach to data quality is informed by ongoing partnership work with Promise Neighborhoods (detailed in appendix I). In short, we will define key metrics of quality (accuracy, consistency, completeness, integrity, and timeliness), process (catalog, compare with metadata, run tests, report, and repair), and how to implement a review process with everyone in a partnership.

Urban and Collaborative member organizations will use a multipronged approach to ensure statistical analyses are based on high-quality data:

Collaboration with DC school data experts. The Collaborative will convene a technical advisory committee composed of senior LEA data managers from both the traditional public and public charter school sectors who will help researchers understand on-the-ground realities that affect data quality and offer guidance to improve the validity and reliability of all analyses. Also, EmpowerK12, one of the Collaborative's member organizations, has extensive experience working with DC school data systems, including multiple student information systems, OSSE's State Longitudinal Education Database and Special Education Data System, and PCSB's Data Hub. They will help Collaborative research partners perform code-based data quality checks across multiple information systems and educational data domains and provide comprehensive guidance related to how schools capture different data.

Comprehensive internal statistical flagging and resolution process. Similar to OSSE’s unified data error Qlik application, the Collaborative will maintain a dashboard of potential data quality errors and outliers as it receives data from the government and schools. Schools participating in various RPP research projects will use the dashboard to better understand their own data and allow Collaborative research organizations to track key data quality metrics related to their projects, improving research productivity and data validity and reliability at both ends of the RPP (school partners and research or practice partners).

Collaborative staff will reach out to the technical advisory committee for guidance on the source of newfound errors and develop relationships with OSSE and LEAs to conduct qualitative follow-up sessions with the right staff members to better understand outlier data. The Collaborative anticipates engaging in an iterative data quality improvement process with LEAs to ensure validity and LEA ownership of data quality. Experience tells us that schools invest more time and energy into data quality as they realize the value of the analyses drawn from their source information. Our success in this work will be measured by the reduction of data quality errors from school source systems over time, even as research project complexity increases.

Data harmonization and documentation. The Urban staff who manage the data archive will carefully clean all data from education agencies to ensure consistency of data definitions across sources and over time. Urban staff have significant experience with such data cleaning and harmonization efforts through the Education Data Portal. Staff will also compile detailed documentation on the data to provide to all users so they understand what items are included in the data and any limitations. For example, if discipline data are collected differently across LEAs and it is not possible to harmonize the data, the documentation will explain this issue and its implications for analyses based on those data. RPP researchers will be transparent in public products about data limitations.

Independence

Independence is a core value of the proposed Collaborative and of any successful RPP. Independent researchers bring the objectivity of a third party and have credibility with the wider community because they follow the data, wherever they might lead. The Collaborative research partners strive to be trusted, honest brokers of data and information about which programs and policies close outcome gaps and support school improvement.

We believe transparency about all aspects of the Collaborative’s work is key to its credibility with and accountability to education agencies, the city council, and the public. All research products produced by the Collaborative will be made public, and those products will be transparent about data, research methods, and funding sources.

All funding Urban receives to support the Collaborative's work must meet Urban's funding principles. These are reproduced in appendix I and include the following:

- Mission. Funding must not conflict with Urban's mission and must support work that adds to public understanding and sharing of ideas.
- Absolute independence. No funder shall determine research findings or the insights and recommendations of researchers.
- Transparency. All contributions will be publicly acknowledged annually and the list posted on our website. When funders support particular products, the funding relationship will be disclosed in that product.

Funding received by Collaborative member organizations to support RPP work must meet a similar set of principles, including independence and transparency.

Finally, the Collaborative will publish an annual report detailing its activities over the prior year, including research summaries, insights from the Advisory Committee, funding sources, and future plans.

3.1.7 Financial Management and Proposed Budget

Financial Management

As the lead entity, the Urban Institute will be the Collaborative's fiscal agent. Urban will receive all core funding for Collaborative activities and process subgrants or subcontracts to other Collaborative member organizations as needed. Collaborative members may also raise their own funds for RPP projects and would be the fiscal agents of those project-specific funds.

Urban's financial management practices ensure accurate, comprehensive, and timely financial reporting to sponsors. Urban uses JAMIS, a comprehensive job-cost accounting and management information system designed to accommodate the special cost-accumulation and reporting requirements in government contracting. With this efficient and cost-effective system, sponsor funding and cost transactions are entered once and automatically posted throughout the system. Invoicing and financial reporting are automated. JAMIS data afford project managers online access to up-to-date project status reports and cost information. JAMIS can also combine current funding and cost data to track project balances by cost category, help project directors budget for future work, and generate customized reports on staff hours and project costs for the current month, current year, and full project period.

Urban's accounting procedures ensure segregation of duties and proper approval of all transactions. Staff who enter and process vendor invoices do not have access to make payments. Also, staff authorized to sign checks or process electronic fund transfers do not have access to enter or process invoices. All project charges are entered into JAMIS and routed to the project leader for approval before posting to the project cost ledger and payment processing.

Potential Funding Sources

We believe it is important that the initial work to build the RPP not be financially supported by the District government. This is a best practice identified by other RPPs, as it is important to establishing the RPP's reputation and credibility as a truly independent "critical friend" of the education agencies.

The Urban Institute will cover the RPP's initial start-up costs, which we estimate at up to \$370,000, until external funding is secured (approximately the first six months). Urban will secure funding for ongoing operations and research by engaging philanthropies whose strategic objectives are aligned with the RPP's mission.

Urban has a strong record of raising funds from diverse public and philanthropic sources and in 2019 raised over \$72 million from foundations and nonprofit organizations. Urban's work on education policy and practice has grown substantially since 2015, and in recent years has received generous support from Arnold Ventures, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Bill and Susan Oberndorf Foundation, the Heising-Simons Foundation, the Joyce Foundation, Lumina Foundation, Overdeck Family Foundation, the Robertson Foundation, the Smith Richardson Foundation, the Spencer Foundation, the Wallace Foundation, and the Walton Family Foundation.

We believe there is significant interest from national funders (e.g., the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Walton Family Foundation) and local funders (e.g., Education Forward) in supporting an RPP in DC. These are funders Urban knows well, and two of them (Gates and Walton) already provide significant support to Urban's education policy work.

RPPs typically draw on local funders who are committed to supporting educational improvement in their own cities, so we will develop a strategy to engage with local funders. Urban has strong relationships with the Morris & Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation, the Meyer Foundation, the Consumer Health Foundation, the Community Foundation of the National Capital Region, and other local and regional funders and intermediaries through Urban-Greater DC. In addition to discussing the RPP with the local philanthropies Urban already works with, we will reach out to our contacts at the Washington Regional Association of Grantmakers and seek opportunities (potentially via a funders' briefing) to engage with their members.

After the RPP is launched, we will pursue project-specific research grants from such funders as the US Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences, the William T. Grant Foundation, the Smith Richardson Foundation, and the Spencer Foundation. Some of these funders occasionally issue requests for proposals for RPP-specific funding competitions. In addition, many of the Collaborative member organizations have established relationships with potential funders and commit to support Urban in this process.

Once the RPP is established as an independent and credible source of evidence and analysis, we will explore the possibility of seeking funding from the District government to support high-value but hard-to-fund aspects of the RPP (e.g., maintaining core data assets so researchers can access data without having to raise project-specific support). We would accept public funding only from agencies willing to work within our funding principles in a way that avoids any real or perceived encroachments on the RPP's independence.

Proposed Budget

The total cost to start up and maintain the RPP will ultimately depend on the precise research activities and available funding. The table below reflects our best estimates of what it would take to do this work well. These totals include both staff time and indirect costs, such as catering or travel, and account for the use of Urban’s resources. These totals do not include the costs of specific research projects, which will vary based on needs, funding, and staffing across Collaborative member organizations. We anticipate funding those projects with a combination of flexible and project-specific support.

Year 1

<i>Line item</i>	<i>Cost</i>	<i>Notes</i>
Community outreach and engagement	\$145,000	This includes time spent talking with community stakeholders, attending community meetings, and meeting with nonprofits and education leaders. This investment in getting to know the community and its needs is critical to ensuring a collaborative partnership that benefits the District’s students and schools.
Collaborative meetings and management	\$310,000	Successfully coordinating 15 organizations requires substantial management to ensure work is efficient and effective. This line item covers the cost of managing the Collaborative’s work, including Leadership Council meetings, subcontracting, grant management, and hiring the RPP management team. This item also covers the cost of producing the mandated annual report.
Data archive	\$140,000	This includes the cost of establishing the infrastructure for the data archive, which will make access to data for RPP work more efficient.
Advisory Committee	\$125,000	Engaging collaboratively with the Advisory Committee is imperative to the RPP’s success. Given that the legislation does not specify who is in charge of planning and running Advisory Committee meetings, we have accounted for the cost of finding a location, setting a date, building an agenda, and providing refreshments. Should others take on those roles, this cost would be reduced to about \$20,000.
Research development	\$80,000	In the first year, research activities will primarily include developing research questions based on the Advisory Committee’s research agenda.
Website	\$70,000	This one-time cost to build a website will ensure the RPP has a professionally designed and branded site to showcase research and other work.
Communications	\$30,000	Disseminating work to stakeholders is central to the RPP’s mission. This line item will allow us to thoughtfully translate research and disseminate findings through various channels.
Total	\$900,000	

Annual costs

The costs below represent our estimated costs once the RPP is fully under way, regularly working on multiple projects and producing research. We anticipate it will take a few years before we are at that point, and costs may be lower in the interim years before the pace of work picks up.

<i>Line item</i>	<i>Cost</i>	<i>Notes</i>
Community outreach and engagement	\$190,000	This includes time spent talking with community stakeholders, attending community meetings, and meeting with nonprofits and education leaders.
Collaborative meetings and management	\$550,000	This line item covers the cost of managing the Collaborative's work, including Leadership Council meetings, subcontracting, grant management, and staff management. This item also covers the cost of producing the mandated annual report.
Data archive	\$90,000	This includes the cost of maintaining the data archive.
Advisory Committee	\$165,000	As above, this cost assumes the Collaborative is finding a location, setting a date, building an agenda, and providing refreshments. Should others take on those roles, this cost would be reduced to about \$20,000.
Research development	\$550,000	This includes the continued cost of developing research projects, creating research teams, raising money for research projects, and working with research and practice partners to hone research ideas.
Communications	\$220,000	Disseminating work to stakeholders is central to the RPP's mission. This line item will allow us to thoughtfully translate research and disseminate findings through various channels.
Total	\$1,765,000	

Institutional Support

If the Collaborative is selected, we will immediately begin standing up the RPP. The Urban Institute will cover the costs of doing so until external funding is secured (which we expect to take up to six months). Initial activities will include working with the District on the master research services agreement, engaging with the Advisory Committee and the community, convening Leadership Council meetings, recruiting new staff, proposing initial projects, building the data archive, and building a website.

We estimate the value of this in-kind support at \$370,000. Urban is also taking on the inherent risk in making a 10-year commitment to the RPP, including the costs of maintaining the partnership through funding gaps that may arise.

Collaborative members will also provide in-kind support to the RPP, including the time people spend attending Leadership Council and other RPP meetings that are not associated with funded projects.

Collaborative members, including Urban, will also contribute their expertise in communications, outreach, data management, grant administration, and community engagement. We believe the RPP's goal is important and are committed to dedicating the time and resources necessary to do this work well on behalf of students.