



CASE STUDY

Turning Research into Action for Community Impact

How Catalyst Collective Group helped a public-sector partner use data and research to inform policy, align investment, and drive measurable outcomes.

PRACTICE AREA

Policy & Investment Strategy

SECTOR

Public Sector / Government
Agency

ENGAGEMENT

Strategic Advisory

OVERVIEW

A public-sector agency had no shortage of data: performance reports, program evaluations, community input, and years of institutional knowledge. What it lacked was a reliable way to turn that evidence into the decisions that mattered most: which policies to pursue, where to direct limited public investment, and how to know whether either was working. CCG was engaged to close that gap, converting research and data into a working framework for policy design, investment alignment, and outcome measurement, grounded in the practices that evidence-based governments nationally have shown to work.

01 THE CHALLENGE

Data and research existed, but they weren't systematically shaping policy decisions or guiding where public investment was directed.

02 THE STRATEGIC RESPONSE

CCG built an evidence-to-decision framework connecting data, policy design, and investment alignment to a consistent system for measuring outcomes.

03 THE IMPACT

Policy decisions became evidence-driven, investment was aligned to what the data showed worked, and outcomes became measurable and reportable.

EVIDENCE EXISTED. IT WASN'T DRIVING DECISIONS.

A Gap Between Data and Decisions

The agency was not short on information. Performance data, program evaluations, and community feedback were all being collected. The open question was whether any of it was actually shaping the policy and budget decisions that determined what residents experienced.

Across departments, data lived in different systems, different formats, and different hands. Program evaluations were completed and filed. Performance metrics were reported because they were required, not because anyone was using them to decide what to fund next. Policy decisions were still being made largely on precedent, political timing, and institutional habit; not because leadership didn't value evidence, but because there was no consistent pipeline that got the right data in front of the right decision-makers at the right moment.

Investment decisions told the same story. Budget allocations often tracked history more closely than they tracked results; funding renewed because it had always been funded, not because it was demonstrably the best use of limited public dollars. Leadership wanted a different starting point: policy and investment decisions that began with evidence, not ended with it as an afterthought.

THE RESEARCH CONTEXT

95%

A national survey of federal managers found that nearly all had at least one type of evidence available for their programs — but when it came to actually using that evidence in decisions like allocating resources, only about half to two-thirds reported doing so. — *U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2021*

100+

Researchers identified more than 100 state laws across 42 states, passed over a single decade, that specifically incentivize agencies to invest in evidence-based programs and practices — a sign of how far the mandate for evidence has outpaced most agencies' actual capacity to act on it. — *The Pew Charitable Trusts, Results First Initiative*

BUILDING AN EVIDENCE-TO-DECISION PIPELINE

Closing the Gap Between Evidence and Action

CCG began by mapping where evidence already existed inside the agency, where it was missing, and, most importantly, where it was failing to reach the people making policy and budget decisions.

The work moved in three parts: a data and evidence inventory across departments, cataloguing what performance data, evaluations, and research already existed and where the gaps were; structured interviews with agency leadership, program staff, and elected officials to understand how policy and budget decisions actually got made, and where evidence could realistically enter that process; and a benchmarking review against national standards for evidence-based and data-driven government, so the agency's practices could be measured against what leading public-sector organizations already do well.

That benchmarking step kept the strategy grounded in more than internal opinion. National practice in this area is well documented, from certification standards used by cities across the country to research on how evidence actually gets used, and misused, inside government decision-making.

WHAT THE RESEARCH SHOWS

National certification standards for data-driven local government identify a consistent pattern in high-performing agencies: they use data not just to report on the past, but to actively inform policy decisions, allocate funding, deliver services, evaluate programs, and engage the public — treating data as an input to decisions rather than a record of them. *Results for America, What Works Cities Certification Standard*

Public-investment research reinforces why this matters financially: cost-benefit and cost-effectiveness analysis allow policymakers to weigh the dollar value of a program's outcomes against its costs, giving leaders an evidence-based way to compare investment options that otherwise look similar on paper. *The Pew Charitable Trusts, Evidence-Based Policymaking*

At the same time, research is clear that having evidence and using it are two different things. Federal survey data has found that even when evidence is available, agencies often lack the staff capacity, technical skill, or internal process to actually put it to work in decisions — meaning the strategy has to build capacity, not just compile data. *U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2021*

ALIGNING DATA, POLICY, AND INVESTMENT

A Framework Built to Connect Evidence to Outcomes

With the assessment complete, CCG designed a structured framework connecting data collection, evidence synthesis, policy design, investment alignment, and outcome monitoring into a single, repeatable pipeline, rather than five disconnected activities happening in five different offices.

The framework was designed to be used, not just adopted. Every stage was paired with a clear owner, a decision point it was meant to inform, and a simple way to know whether it was working, so that using evidence would become how decisions get made by default, rather than an extra step layered on top of business as usual.

DATA INFRASTRUCTURE A shared way to collect and access performance and program data across departments.	EVIDENCE SYNTHESIS Research and evaluation findings translated into clear, decision-ready summaries.	POLICY DESIGN Policy options developed and compared against the evidence for what actually works.
INVESTMENT ALIGNMENT Budget and capital decisions weighed using cost-benefit analysis tied to outcomes.	OUTCOME MONITORING Ongoing dashboards and reporting that track whether results are actually materializing.	STAKEHOLDER GOVERNANCE A clear process for bringing evidence to elected officials and the public, not just staff.

"The goal was never to produce more research. It was to make sure the research that already existed actually reached the moment a policy or budget decision got made."

CCG STRATEGIC INSIGHT

CLIENT PRIORITY Leadership needed a repeatable way to bring evidence into policy and budget decisions before choices were finalized.

WHY IT MATTERED

From Data to Decisions to Results

The agency moved from a place where good data existed alongside decisions it rarely touched, to one where evidence has a defined path into policy design and budget conversations. Leadership can now point to the data behind a decision, not just the decision itself, a shift that matters as much for public trust as it does for internal efficiency.

This kind of shift shows up across the field wherever it takes hold. One certified data-driven city, for example, used its evidence-informed process improvements to cut its zoning appeal decision timeline from 78 days down to 12 over a seven-month period, a concrete illustration of what aligning data with decisions can produce. City of Philadelphia, Bloomberg Philanthropies What Works Cities Certification, 2025

"Evidence-based government isn't about having more data. It's about building the muscle to act on the data you already have."

CCG STRATEGIC INSIGHT

IMPACT AT A GLANCE

01 POLICY GROUNDED IN EVIDENCE

Policy decisions now draw on a consistent evidence base rather than precedent alone.

02 INVESTMENT ALIGNED TO OUTCOMES

Budget decisions are weighed against cost-benefit evidence tied to results.

03 MEASURABLE, REPORTABLE RESULTS

Outcome monitoring gives leadership an ongoing view of what is and isn't working.

IMPLEMENTATION OUTPUTS

- 6 framework components integrated
- 3 diagnostic workstreams completed
- 1 repeatable evidence-to-decision pipeline

LESSONS FOR LEADERS

What This Case Demonstrates

- Having data and using it in decisions are two different capabilities — build both.
- Evidence changes outcomes only when it reaches the moment a decision is actually made.
- Aligning investment to outcomes requires a consistent way to compare costs and benefits.

Sources Referenced

CITED IN THIS CASE STUDY

1. U.S. Government Accountability Office (2021). Evidence-Based Policymaking: Survey Data Identify Opportunities to Strengthen Capacity across Federal Agencies. GAO-21-536.
2. The Pew Charitable Trusts (2014). Evidence-Based Policymaking: A Guide for Effective Government. Results First Initiative.
3. The Pew Charitable Trusts (2017). How States Engage in Evidence-Based Policymaking.
4. Results for America / Bloomberg Philanthropies. What Works Cities Certification Standard.
5. City of Philadelphia, Mayor's Office of Policy, Planning and Delivery (2025). Results for America Awards Philadelphia with Bloomberg Philanthropies What Works Cities Certification.

RESEARCH CONTEXT

National sources informed the agency benchmark. The Philadelphia example on page 5 illustrates field practice and is not presented as a client result.

The Next Horizon

An evidence-to-decision pipeline is not a one-time deliverable — it is a capability an agency carries into every future budget cycle and policy debate. CCG partners with public-sector leaders to keep strengthening that foundation, from the next data system to the next policy built on what the evidence actually shows.



ABOUT CATALYST COLLECTIVE GROUP

Catalyst Collective Group (CCG) is a strategic growth and business development advisory firm that helps organizations build the partnerships, positioning, and operational capacity required to scale outcomes. We support nonprofits, government agencies, educational institutions, healthcare organizations, foundations, and mission-driven businesses with solutions that include executive strategy, partnership development, operational excellence, revenue diversification, and community impact planning—ensuring growth is aligned, measurable, and sustainable.

Our mission is to transform ideas into investment, partnerships into progress, and vision into measurable, sustainable impact.

Catalyzing Growth. Building Influence. Creating Legacy.