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Dear Friends of the Working Cities Challenge:

We are pleased to share the attached Baseline Evaluation of the Working Cities Challenge (WCC) -- conducted by Mt. Auburn Associates, with the help of Abt Associates – in the spirit of shared learning. The Boston Fed is deeply committed to our district’s smaller industrial cities, and to fostering the collaboration and leadership necessary for these cities to flourish economically. We have spent a good deal of time reviewing and discussing this evaluation, and want to highlight some of our high level lessons and responses.

We are pleased that a large majority (89%) of both winning and non-winning teams will carry on the work they planned for their WCC initiative. It appears that the application process, including the design requirement that each city work as a team and submit only one application, contributed to new conversations and momentum behind this work, which will help low-income residents.

We are also pleased to learn that civic infrastructure measures are relatively high in the winning cities, though there is room for progress particularly in community and business sector engagement.

It is also clear from the evaluation that participating teams felt that the application process, and the process immediately after winning, could be improved so that expectations, and the time commitment required to apply and to participate, are clearer, more predictable and shortened where possible. While some elements of the design cannot be changed, we commit to doing our best in this round and in future rounds to be as clear as possible, and provide as much advance notice as possible of important dates, deadlines, and related milestones.

We are sympathetic to the concern that winning teams had to significantly adapt their efforts to fit new budgets once the prize awards were announced (because prize amounts varied, and most teams had understandably hoped to receive the top prize). We hope to support team efficiency, so we will work with our steering committee and the prize funders for predictable and consistent prize awards to minimize the degree of adjustment that must be done after awards are announced.

The learning community – gatherings of winning and non-winning city team members – will be focused on some of the issues highlighted in this evaluation, including resident and business engagement, the use of data in community change efforts, and planning for systems change. In addition, we are continuing to work with teams to make the learning communities as strong as possible, through evaluations, joint planning sessions and more.

If you have questions about this evaluation or our responses to it, please feel free to reach out to me at tamar.kotelchuck@bos.frb.org.

Thank you.

Tamar

Tamar Kotelchuck
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