From: Bloomberg Government Innovation
To: bbethune@cityofmyrtlebeach.com
Subject: [External]Financial counseling goes virtual
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How virtual financial counseling is boosting people's bottom line

When the COVID-19 pandemic took hold in March, cities were forced to transition the face-to-face financial counseling sessions they offered low- and middle-income residents into virtual meetings. Three months later, a number of those cities—including **Pittsburgh** and **Syracuse**, N.Y.— report that the virtual sessions are actually helping, rather than hindering, residents' work toward their financial goals. Now, thanks to new funding available to all U.S. cities through the Cities for Financial Empowerment Fund, city leaders can dig deeper into these efforts to help people get through the crisis and back on their feet.

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Bloomberg releases COVID-19 management metrics for cities

Bloomberg Philanthropies today released the “COVID-19 Management Metrics for Cities,” developed by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and What Works Cities, to help city leaders collect and analyze key data to guide the next phase of recovery while keeping the most vulnerable residents’ needs front-and-center. The set of critical indicators, plus technical assistance for cities around their utilization, are the latest offering from the Bloomberg Philanthropies COVID-19 Local Response Initiative.

These new resources aim to help city leaders analyze data in seven key areas to enable better pandemic-related decision making, including: status of local infection rate; capacity of the healthcare system; status of testing and contact tracing system; level of compliance with public-health safety measures; protection and preparedness of essential workers; protection and preparedness of congregate facilities such as nursing homes and prisons; and preparedness

of business for reopening.

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Catch up on all of our COVID-19 coverage below, and get news on the latest city actions by subscribing to our City Hall COVID-19 Update.

- New contact tracing solutions from **Baltimore**
- 4 mayors on the challenges of the protests and the pandemic
- As two crises evolve, U.S. cities show they know how to lead
- How some cities are pulling off socially distant protests
- Messaging around the protests: What America's mayors are saying

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MEET **BRION OAKS**

Title: Chief Equity Officer
City: Austin, Texas

Brion Oaks was tackling health disparities long before COVID-19 put the issue so clearly into focus. That was his job at the American Heart Association for 14 years prior to becoming **Austin**'s first chief equity officer in 2016.

So when the pandemic hit and the city and county mobilized their emergency operations center, Oaks embedded into multiple teams to make sure equity was baked into the response. In addition, his team produced a short guide to equity considerations around COVID-19, including eight questions for city leaders to ask themselves while quickly standing up recovery programs.

One win was the creation of a $2-million financial aid program that gives cash directly to families experiencing COVID-related hardships. "The innovation was to say, 'You know what? We trust families to make smart decisions about what their family needs to spend money on," Oaks said. "In 72 hours, we were able to help 1,000 families."

That bold stroke built on Oaks' ongoing work with city agencies to break down institutional racism and advance racial equity. His team uses an equity-assessment tool to help agencies understand their strengths and weaknesses, and then works with them to develop and implement an action plan before coming back for another assessment. It's what Oaks calls a "continuous improvement process" so that agencies can "continue to build muscle around equity and get better and better at it."

A critical part of this process is training of agency staff. “If we’re going to ask our staff to adopt this equity lens, we have to give them the training and resources and help to build the competencies and skill set,” Oaks said, adding that many of these trainings are events attended by community members. “We think it’s important to have this discussion around race and racism collectively—with our staff and community, and not just us,” Oaks said. “Because we want our staff to be able to hear about some of those life experiences from the community perspective.”

Pro tip: “A good equity office is one that senior executives don’t always agree with. If they always agree with me, I’m not doing my job.”

WHAT WE’RE READING

TRANSPARENCY: City leaders should adopt “radical transparency” in their handling of police data to help dismantle racism and bias in policing, write Results for America’s Clarence Wardell and Georgetown University’s Denice Ross, who outline five datasets they recommend cities release first. (Boston Globe)

BOLD LEADERSHIP: As the United States grapples with two pandemics—COVID-19 and racial inequity—local government leaders are making many of the most important decisions in the country. (Axios)

DATA: **New Haven**, Conn., and **Carmel**, Ind., are turning to an unlikely source for insight into possible COVID-19 outbreaks—their sewage systems (The Verge)

PARKS: The COVID-19 pandemic has made parks more vital to the health of cities than ever before as people look to access spaces that allow for social distancing. (U.S News)

NETWORK NEWS

FUNDING OPPORTUNITY: The Cities for Financial Empowerment Fund is requesting applications for a cohort of local governments looking to provide financial information and referrals to residents impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and economic fallout, also known as financial navigation. Apply here and attend an informational webinar to learn more **today at 3 p.m. EDT.**

JOB OPPORTUNITY: Bloomberg Philanthropies' Government Innovation Team is hiring a Program Manager to help oversee two programs: the Bloomberg

Harvard City Leadership Initiative and the What Works Cities initiative.

JOB OPPORTUNITY: Syracuse, N.Y., is hiring a Chief Data Officer responsible for creating a vision for city-wide data-informed decision-making and making processes more efficient and effective.

JOB OPPORTUNITY: **Baltimore** is hiring a CitiStat Analyst to grow a data-driven culture and leverage data to improve service delivery to city residents.

Contact us to share events and job postings with the Bloomberg Cities network.

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