



**Clear and Credible Information from Social and Behavioral Science To Improve Societal  
Outcomes: Current Approaches and Future Directions**

**A Seminar of the Roundtable on the Communication and Use of Social and Behavioral Science  
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**Mission:**

Urban's mission is to open minds, shape decisions, and offer solutions through economic and social policy research.

**Type of entity:**

Urban is a nonprofit policy research organization. It has been incorporated and is operated as a public charity. It has received official IRS recognition of its tax-exempt status under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.

**Issue Areas:**

Over 450 employees in 11 research centers and groups work to understand the problems facing America's cities. Today, Urban's research portfolio ranges from the social safety net to health and tax policies; the well-being of families and neighborhoods; and trends in work, earnings, and wealth building. Urban's policy centers include:

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## POLICY CENTERS

- Center on International Development and Governance
  - Center on Labor, Human Services, and Population
  - Center on Nonprofits and Philanthropy
  - Health Policy Center
  - Housing Finance Policy Center
  - Income and Benefits Policy Center
  - Justice Policy Center
  - Metropolitan Housing and Communities Policy Center
  - **Policy Advisory Group**
  - Statistical Methods Group
  - Urban-Brookings Tax Policy Center
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## Intended audiences and purposes for communicating:

Founded in 1968 to understand the problems facing America's cities and assess the programs of the War on Poverty, the Urban Institute brings decades of objective analysis and expertise to policy debates — in **city halls** and **state houses**, **Congress** and the **White House**, and **emerging democracies** around the world. Urban believes public policies work best when they are rooted in facts, and its research sparks solutions in programs and practice.

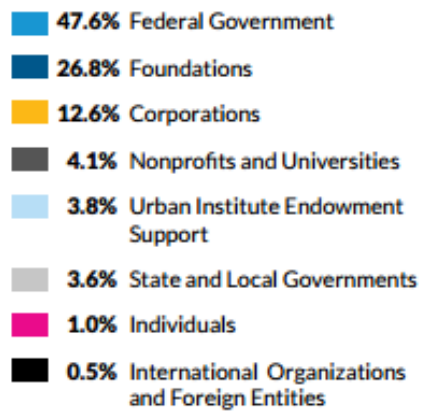
Contemporary social, demographic, environmental, and economic issues pose special challenges for **local leaders**. Urban believes urban challenges are not cities' alone to solve. **Cities** across the country are facing similar challenges around housing affordability, paying for service delivery, local governance capacity, and more. Urban conducts sophisticated research to understand and solve real-world challenges in this rapidly urbanizing environment. Its work engages communities at multiple levels — city, state, and country — as it gathers data and evaluates programs. Urban Institute's scholars blend academic rigor with on-the-ground collaboration, teaming with **policymakers, community leaders, practitioners**, and **the private sector** to diagnose problems and find solutions.

## Governance and funding:

The Urban Institute receives funding from all levels of government to conduct research, evaluate programs, and offer technical assistance. Urban also receives philanthropic contributions from individuals, foundations, nonprofits, universities, and corporations that support its research, evidence-based policy development, and outreach and engagement.

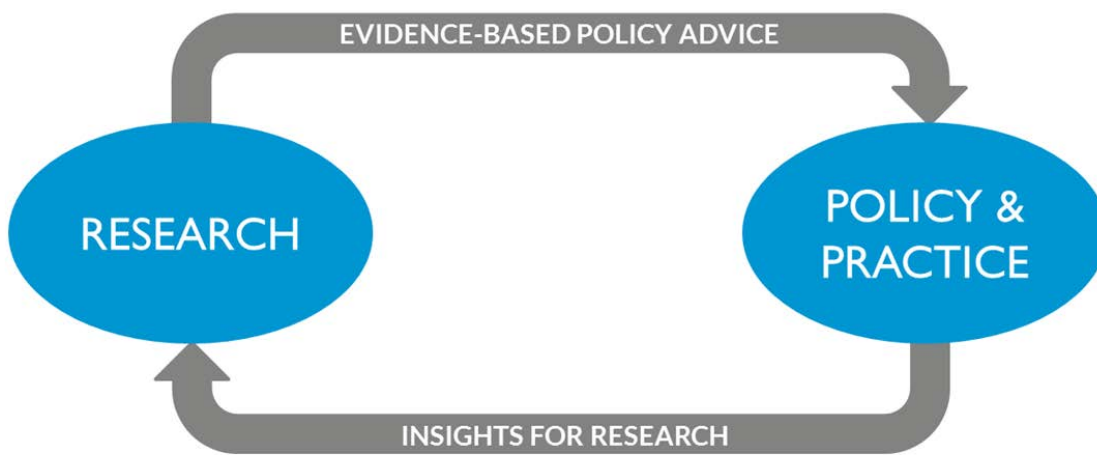
2014 Financials:

## Revenue



Process for topic selection or assignment:

Underlying the approach of Poethig's team, the Policy Advisory Group, is the fundamental belief that quality research should inform and improve policy and practice, and that the needs of policymakers and practitioners should inform and improve social science research. This relationship between these two components of work is what PAG calls the **cycle of evidence transmission** between researchers and policymakers. In selecting topics for research, listening to policymakers and decisionmakers on the ground to understand both what questions they have, what decisions they need to make and what they are willing to fund is one essential ingredient in ensuring research has an impact and is successfully translated to policy and practice.



## Methods of synthesis and communication:

Though Urban's researchers have always been sought by decisionmakers for their expertise, the Policy Advisory Group represents a new team of Urban staff dedicated to better understanding decisionmakers' needs and challenges, helping create solutions, and aggregating learnings to support broader field building. By working with scholars across Urban, PAG develops insights from existing work and new research to create products and projects that systematically translate what we know into strategies for actionable work on the ground.

PAG offers a range of support strategies to fit the needs and interests of leaders at four different stages in the policymaking process: problem definition, strategy development, evaluation, and sharing and networking of promising ideas. PAG's products are responsive to specific policy challenges and enhanced by a sustained level of engagement from our team.

PAG also works within Urban to enhance the capacity of researchers to design rigorous, policy-relevant research proposals; communicate the relevance of research findings to policymakers and other nonacademic audiences; and connect with funders who are similarly interested in the development of actionable knowledge.

## Examples of impact:

Though the Policy Advisory Group is still in its early stages of development, it has already seen early signs of significant policy impact and has established a solid foundation from which to build upon, most notably around its support for the MacArthur Foundation's How Housing Matters Initiative.

The MacArthur Foundation's How Housing Matters to Families and Communities \$25 million research initiative (funding over 40 research projects) seeks to determine how stable, decent, affordable housing has effects on education, employment, health and other outcomes. As public resources remain scarce, this rigorous program of near- and longer-term research focuses on questions of interest to policymakers and makes it possible to demonstrate whether or not and how housing policy can achieve a greater return on investments in a range of important areas of concern.

Leveraging this investment, last April PAG hosted a How Housing Matters to Promote Economic Mobility roundtable in Chicago with the intention of engaging policymakers, researchers, funders, and practitioners to lift up research insights, apply them to practice and policy concerns, identify remaining questions, and build relationships. In preparation for the round table discussion, the team authored a synthesis paper that brought a range of research findings related to this high priority topic to a policymaker audience in an actionable format.

The approach succeeded in:

- Defining complex topics (income inequality, economic mobility) that are inconsistently used in the media

- Identifying specific evidence-based policy levers and actions decision-makers can take
- Enabling evidence-driven conversation by providing “approachable” research

Post round table, the team used a data visualization to bring a small piece of the paper’s analysis to a wider audience, published blogs to elevate and emphasize specific recommendations and takeaways, and leveraged social media to spark a conversation around how housing policy can be used to promote economic mobility. The synthesis paper and accompanying products in this portfolio have been well-received by White House officials and others, and this approach to communicating and translating research to policy and practice is being expanded to other projects.

#### Additional Resources:

**Urban’s website** - <http://www.urban.org/>

**Policy Advisory Group** - <http://www.urban.org/policy-centers/policy-advisory-group>

**Housing Policy Levers to Promote Economic Mobility paper** - <http://www.urban.org/research/publication/housing-policy-levers-promote-economic-mobility>

**Data visualization** - <http://www.urban.org/urban-wire/visualizing-housing-policys-impact-inequality>

**Blogs** - <http://www.urban.org/urban-wire/how-housing-matters-economic-mobility>,  
<http://www.urban.org/urban-wire/using-housing-policy-tools-build-ladders-middle-class>