Policy Labs: Unlocking Solutions with Existing Data

A new multi-million dollar, national initiative called “Policy Labs” is bringing together data analysis experts, social scientists, and state officials to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of public programs.

Spread across six states and the District of Columbia, these unique private-public partnerships are serving as incubators for social change, studying topics like youth employment, recidivism, and degree accreditation programs at the direction of public officials. The goal of the program is to help governments at both ends of the political spectrum implement advanced methods of data analysis and research to improve public policies.

Led by some of the foremost social science experts in the country, the labs are carrying out more than 160 projects that have reallocated more than $150 million to more effective and efficient programs. The grant program is supported by the Laura and John Arnold Foundation, the largest funder of evidence-based policymaking in the United States. The foundation has invested more than $38 million to develop and expand the model.

What is a Policy Lab?

Labs serve several core functions, helping governments:

- **Analyze data**
  to understand the needs of citizens

- **Predict the impact**
  of new policies

- **Redesign programs**
  and

- **Redirect money**
  to effective programs or to meet rising demand

Colorado Policy Lab: Using data to help youths in foster care

Policy lab researchers used existing data to solve a pervasive issue: Youths in the foster care system were dropping out at higher rates than their peers. After identifying high mobility as the root cause, researchers advised the state on ways to remove transportation barriers – reducing the number of times a student would switch schools.

Areas of Focus

**CALIFORNIA**
Homelessness, poverty, criminal justice, inequity

**COLORADO**
Education, higher education, system-involved youth, recidivism, multi-system users, human services

**WASHINGTON, D.C.**
Criminal justice, education, economic opportunity, government operations

**GEORGIA**
Education, career and technical education policy

**MICHIGAN**
Education, child welfare, summer youth employment

**RHODE ISLAND**
Criminal justice, poverty, education

**TEXAS**
Criminal justice, veterans programs, and child and family protective services

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160 Projects Underway

$38.1 MILLION Total Funding Committed

30+ Researchers

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