

What Works: Highlighting Urban Reforms

BY HOWARD HUSOCK

For decades, the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research has developed and promoted ideas that have made America's cities better places to live and work. With nearly 80 percent of Americans living in or around cities, urban policy should be on everyone's agenda, particularly *state-focused* free-market think tanks, since contrary to popular belief, most of the successful reforms have come from the Right.

For too long urban policy has been synonymous with expensive and ineffective, and counterproductive, big-government programs. Rejecting the War on Poverty's failed nostrums, the Manhattan Institute has worked to develop effective approaches to urban governance – welfare reform, broken-windows policing, school choice – that helped New York City (and other cities that have followed its lead) to focus on its core functions, and reestablish its role as an engine of economic dynamism.

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Now, at a time when some accuse limited-government proponents of lacking constructive ideas, MI is expanding its urban agenda and looking to work with think tanks around the country to build on this success. State think tanks can help identify and magnify good ideas in their respective states and contribute to the fusion of research, articles and podcasts on www.CitiesOnAHill.org.

CitiesOnAHill.org, a project of MI's Center for Civic Innovation, will highlight how local and state governments can better fulfill their core responsibilities in cost effective ways. The Cities on a



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Hill urban agenda includes pragmatic policy guidance to reduce crime, reform or phase out public housing, improve education through school choice, enlist the private sector to deliver public services or finance infrastructure, and cut the overhanging public pension costs that threaten state budgets. Consider

some of the success stories, each of which deserves emulation in cities throughout the nation.

Renee Glover, president and CEO of Atlanta's Housing Authority, has demolished housing projects and instead, through vouchers and a work requirement, provided an opportunity for individuals to escape the cycle of poverty. Glover's efforts earned her CCI's 2009 Urban Innovator Award, an annual program that celebrates the policy entrepreneurs who have shown how meaningful, cost-effective reform is possible.

The Urban Innovator Award has also celebrated Indiana governor Mitch Daniels for restoring the state's fiscal health through creative public finance approaches and Los Angeles police chief William Bratton for instituting paradigm-shifting anti-crime policies, first advocated by Manhattan Institute fellows, and then applying those new procedures to counter terrorism.

In Newark, New Jersey, Democratic Mayor Cory Booker is extending the successes of welfare reform, which have been effective in bringing single mothers into the workforce and their children out of poverty, to inner-city men. With MI's help in working on the ground to create a network of agencies and experts, Booker organized a program for newly released prisoners which emphasizes "rapid attachment to work" as the antidote to recidivism, and a key to crime reduction.

These proven case studies for urban reform can become a meaningful resource for reform-minded municipal leaders across the country. SPN think tanks, that know their localities well, can partner with the Manhattan Institute to highlight innovative leaders and effective urban policies. In contrast to those who look to Washington, D.C. to save our cities, we believe cities can save themselves – if they embrace ideas that work. Cities on a Hill is a resource for best-practices in urban governance and will serve as a clearinghouse for a comprehensive urban agenda built on the foundations of liberty and entrepreneurship. [SPN](#)



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