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BUILDING THE HOMEWOOD CHILDREN'S VILLAGE

2009 Allegheny County DHS Local Government Case Competition

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Allegheny County Department of Human Services

The Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS) is dedicated to meeting the human services needs of county residents, particularly the county's most vulnerable populations, through an extensive range of prevention, early intervention, crises management and after-care services.

The research contained in this report was conducted by the Office of Data Analysis, Research and Evaluation (DARE), an office within DHS. DARE conducts research related to the activities of DHS offices including: Aging; Behavioral Health; Children, Youth and Families, Community Services and Mental Retardation/Developmental Disabilities and reviews and publishes reports initiated by other DHS offices.

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Abbreviations

CYF	Office of Children, Youth and Families
DHS	Department of Human Services
DARE	Office of Data Analysis, Research and Evaluation
HCV	Homewood Children's Village
HCZ	Harlem Children's Zone

Contributors

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Private sector companies have long held case competitions and invited graduate students to solve problems as a way to recruit both fresh ideas and the best and brightest prospective employees. The DHS launched its Local Government Case Competition in 2007 with the same objectives. It was hoped that the competition could generate interest in local government issues and encourage students to use what they learn in the classroom to assist DHS with some of the challenges inherent in human services delivery.

2009 CASE COMPETITION

The 2009 case competition drew more participants than ever (61 students) and students were recruited from new areas of study including law, business and public health. Judged by individuals from community organizations, local universities, foundations and DHS, the case competition was kicked off on a Thursday evening when students were given the case challenge and introduced to their teammates. After learning about Homewood and the HCV, 16 teams were given the next day and a half to develop a 5-year strategic plan for a child-centered neighborhood based on the HCZ model, but tailored to the uniqueness of Homewood.

The Homewood Children's Village

While previous case competitions solicited students' help to address issues specific to DHS, participants in 2009 were asked to develop a strategic plan for a local collaborative called the Homewood Children's Village (HCV). Modeled after the successful Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ), the HCV aims to provide educational, medical and social services to children and their families in the Homewood area of Pittsburgh. This holistic approach has worked in Harlem. Schools within the Zone there have seen astonishing increases in parental involvement and student achievement, and HCV hopes to replicate this success.

The grassroots genesis of this effort has been significant. Community leaders in Homewood have worked with residents to not only assess unmet needs, but identify the neighborhood's existing assets and capitalize on them. Joined by representatives from government agencies, religious institutions and schools, they have been encouraging organizations that provide services to children and families in Homewood to collaborate and share resources. The HCV became a legal non-profit organization in 2009.

Results

Student teams approached the challenge from a variety of perspectives, but the team that ultimately won the competition impressed the judges with their knowledge of Homewood’s existing assets and their ability to weave new and creative ideas into the HCV mission. There were interesting and actionable ideas provided by all of the teams, however, which are summarized in the Findings section of this report.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

DHS solicited opinions about all aspects of the 2009 competition from participants—judges, students and DHS staff—in order to continue to evolve and improve the case competition. Feedback was received in surveys distributed and collected the final day of the competition and in a focus group held two months after the competition. A summary of these findings is contained in Conclusions and Recommendations and actual comments from participants are included in the appendices.

DHS CASE COMPETITION HISTORY

As part of its 10-year anniversary celebration in 2007, DHS recruited 52 students from local universities pursuing graduate work in public policy and social work to envision DHS as it might look on its 20-year anniversary, in 2017. Students presented their findings and recommendations to a panel of academic and industry judges for review and ideas ranged from employing emerging technologies to assisting the senior population in Allegheny County, to positioning DHS as a leader in the environmental sustainability movement. In 2008, 46 students worked to more specifically delve into some of the ways DHS could embed environmental sustainability into its policies and operations. Teams suggested incentives to encourage public transit usage and ways to make it more convenient for DHS agencies and providers to recycle.

The 2009 competition included 61 students pursuing degrees in a variety of academic disciplines including social work, public health, business and law. Again, the competition served as an opportunity to:

- Engage graduate students in local government issues (especially human services)
- Use local talent to provide community leaders with compelling ideas
- Build relationships among local graduate students
- Create a networking opportunity for judges and student participants
- Allow students to apply what they are learning in a tangible way

2009 Case Competition

Participants in the 2009 case competition were asked to develop a 5-year strategic plan to help the HCV committee set priorities and begin to implement programs that would improve the lives of children in Homewood. Interdisciplinary student teams were asked to consider systemic problems—poverty, blight, high crime rate—and recommend ways to address them. Teams were then tasked with formulating their plans under simulated business conditions (e.g. time deadlines and incomplete information) and presented their results to judging panels comprised of community stakeholders and DHS staff.

PARTICIPANTS

Students

Sixty-one graduate students, divided among 16 teams, participated in the case competition. Participants included students from three local universities and nine programs of study:

- Carnegie Mellon University
 - Heinz College (17)

Background

- Duquesne University
 - Social and Public Policy (5)
 - Graduate School of Business (2)
- University of Pittsburgh
 - School of Law (10)
 - Katz Graduate School of Business (4)
 - School of Social Work (14)
 - Graduate School of Public and International Affairs (7)
 - Graduate School of Public Health (2)

The 2009 competition drew more participants than the first two competitions and participants were recruited from new areas of study including law, business and public health. Students were divided into interdisciplinary teams, based primarily on academic programs, but also on demographic factors such as gender, race and age. A demographic profile of the 2009 competition participants who responded to the DHS optional survey is listed below:

- Age: Students ranged in age from 21 to 59 years old (average age was 26).
- Gender: 36 women and 25 men participated.
- Race:
 - Caucasian: 38
 - African-American/Black: 4
 - Asian/Pacific-Islander: 9
 - Latino: 7
 - Biracial: 1
 - Multiracial: 1

Judges

The competition was judged by 22 individuals on four panels, representing community organizations, local universities, foundations, DHS staff members and winners from previous years. A subject matter expert from the HCV sat on each panel. Organizations represented this year included:

- Adoption Legal Services Project
- Allegheny County Executive's Office
- Allegheny County Department of Human Services
- Gove Group, Inc.
- Falk Foundation
- Homewood Children's Village
- Operation Better Block
- Pittsburgh Public Schools
- PNC Community Development Banking Group

Background

- Richard King Mellon Foundation
- United Cerebral Palsy of Pittsburgh
- University of Pittsburgh
- YMCA of Greater Pittsburgh

An additional 12 DHS staff members handled logistics and planning, ensuring that the event went smoothly.

COMPETITION LOGISTICS

Opening Reception—Thursday, November 12, 2009

DHS kicked off the 2009 case competition with a catered evening reception held at the Human Services Building in downtown Pittsburgh. DHS staff members introduced the case, announced the pre-assigned teams and answered questions. Each student received a USB/Flash drive loaded with case materials including background information on the HCZ and HCV. After the assignments were announced, students were given time to meet with their new teammates and plan for the following 36 hours.

Case Preparation—Friday, November 13, 2009

Teams had all day Friday to independently conduct their research and planning. Presentations had to be e-mailed by 7:00 a.m. Saturday morning to DHS staff and all team members were required to check in by 8:00 a.m. on Saturday at the University Of Pittsburgh Alumni Hall in Oakland.

Case Presentations—Saturday, November 14, 2009

Participants and judges enjoyed a continental breakfast while rooms were assigned and presentation order was distributed. All 16 teams conducted their 20-minute presentations in front of one of four judging panels throughout the morning and first round winners were announced at lunch. The final four teams were also given a case twist, which they had half an hour to accomplish. Namely, they were asked to tailor their existing presentations to a specific funder and also shorten it to 12 minutes. The four judging panels came together to hear the final presentations, deliberate and announce the winning team who received a cash prize of \$3,000. Second and third place winners won cash prizes of \$1,500 and \$500 respectively. Fourth place team members each received a \$25 gift card and a T-shirt commemorating the competition.

Participants were judged on verbal presentation and technical presentation, overall impression of presentation, scope of presentation, team performance, Q&A and team demeanor.

THE CASE: A CHILD-CENTERED HOMEWOOD

Background

A decreasing population, crime, poverty and neighborhood blight have created an environment that is not conducive to academic excellence for the children of Homewood. According to a school proficiency report released by the Allegheny Conference on Community Development in 2008, regional school proficiency levels have continued to improve while the proficiency of children in economically disadvantaged areas like Homewood has decreased since 2006. Reading and math proficiency levels for Homewood children are even lower when compared to benchmarks in the Pittsburgh Public Schools. In fact, only 38 percent of students entering high school in Homewood are proficient in reading, according to 2008 statistics.

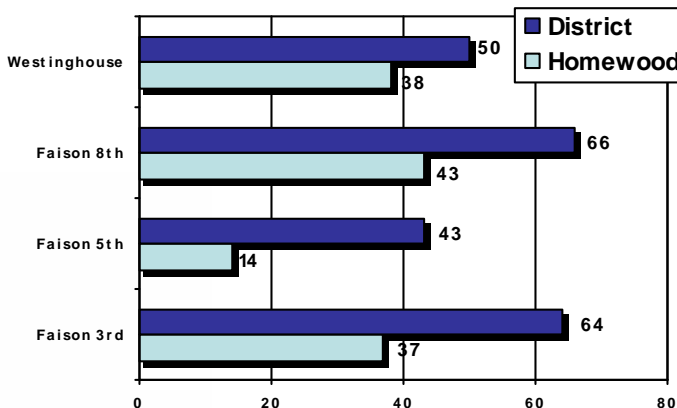


Figure 1: Reading Proficiency in Homewood (2008)

In an effort to enhance Homewood’s assets and improve outcomes for children, a steering committee of key strategic partners in Homewood was assembled to design and implement the HCV in 2008. Developed on the successful HCZ, model, HCV’s mission is to simultaneously improve the lives of Homewood’s children and to reweave the fabric of the community in which they live. Accomplishments to date include: raising nearly \$500,000 for planning the HCV; entering into a legal agreement with the YMCA of Greater Pittsburgh to establish the HCV as a 509(a) (3) organization; and using HCZ Beacon Community Center as a model to develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the HCV and Pittsburgh Public Schools to transform Westinghouse High School into a full-service community school.

The Challenge

At the opening night reception for the competition, Aliya Durham, Urban District Vice President of the YMCA of Greater Pittsburgh and co-chair of the HCV, talked about her experiences as a community organizer in Homewood and challenged participants to identify specific ways for the HCV committee to adopt the values of the HCZ and achieve similar successes. Participants were asked to imagine that they were part of a planning team in Homewood that recently received a one-time \$1 million Promise Neighborhoods grant as part of the Obama administration's plan to replicate the HCZ in 20 cities across the U.S. Their task was to develop a five-year plan for a child-centered neighborhood based on the best practices of the HCZ model, but which still reflected the unique values, culture, and assets of the Homewood community.

Specific Questions:

- What are the major goals of your effort?
- Because resources (financial, human capital, etc.) are limited, what should the priorities be for this project, both in the short- and long-term?
- What barriers and risks stand in the way of successful implementation?
- This effort has the potential to affect many different stakeholders. Does your plan address the ways in which each of these groups can be involved in planning, implementation, programming and sustainability—including DHS?
- What infrastructure (physical, technological, human) will be needed to accomplish your goals?
- How will you raise and sustain funding over time?
- What outcomes do you expect to achieve by the end of the initial five years?
- How will you evaluate this initiative?

Considerations:

- Best estimates suggest that it will ultimately require a yearly budget of over \$11 million to support this effort.
- Research has shown that a substantial amount of public funding goes towards services that treat poor outcomes for children, instead of trying to prevent those outcomes.
- Assume that the HCV includes all three Homewood neighborhoods—North, South, & West.
- Although the HCZ model should be taken into account, replicating the exact programming or structure of that initiative is not an acceptable approach to the case challenge.

Case Findings

WINNING SOLUTION FOR A CHILD-CENTERED HOMEWOOD

The winners of the 2009 Local Government Case Competition focused on Homewood's existing assets and suggested that the HCV first try to improve Homewood's physical environment and engage the community. Their solution won the judges over, in part, because they recommended that one organization facilitate all of the initiatives they were proposing in addition to building a database to track services Homewood families receive across systems. This would minimize the duplication of services and ensure that children and families were getting what they needed when they needed it.



Figure 2: Homewood: Change from Within (Fort Pitt)

Their phased-approach was carried out over five years as follows:

Phase I— Year 1

- Hire an Executive Director and Program Development Officer.
- Collaborate with existing organizations such as the YMCA and Operation Better Block.
- Identify lowest 15 percent of all Homewood students.
- Assess all of the services Homewood children are receiving.

Phase II—Years 2 and 3

- Implement critical effects-based programs such as Baby College and tutoring.
- Initiate a micro financing program and engage the community in neighborhood beautification.
- Build cross-organizational database to track children.
- Conduct yearly review to track progress.

Phase III—Years 4 and 5

- Initiate second-wave programs: infrastructure and community programs (continuing education, neighborhood beautification, rent-to-own programs, grocery store, and SAT/college prep).
- Continue building sustainable relationships with community partners and incorporate outside support.
- Start community study to measure overall program impact.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Remaining teams approached the task of enhancing the HCV’s efforts from a variety of perspectives. Some based their recommendations on improving infrastructure while others advocated for implementing their plans through family-based initiatives. Many of the teams created their plans with Homewood’s existing assets as the foundation, while others advocated for bringing new individuals and organizations to the effort. Over the next few pages, DHS has summarized their recommendations, extracting unique ideas and identifying common themes.

1. Consolidate service delivery

Although the names of their organizations differed, a number of teams shared the notion that all programmatic endeavors should be facilitated through one entity. They acknowledged organizations already providing services to Homewood children and families and felt it was important for the HCV to focus on consolidating service delivery. These teams also believed that speaking with one strong unified voice would result in the ability to involve more stakeholders.

A newly-established Homewood Vitality Corporation will manage these initiatives.

- ▶ Organized under the 501(c)(3) tax status designation
- ▶ Have a Board of Directors comprised of community leaders, a representative from DHS, and youth ambassadors
- ▶ Hire community clean-up and watch employees
- ▶ Write and administer grants through contractors
- ▶ Coordinate services between DHS, contracted, and community organizations to encourage cooperation
- ▶ Convene community feedback forums and develop strategic plans

INFRASTRUCTURE



Figure 3: A Strategy for Community Growth & Child Development in Homewood (Bloomfield)

Figure 4: Homewood Children’s Village: Dual Focus, Dual Impact (Roberto Clemente)

Case Findings

- Funnel services through one organization
 - Increase the scope of the current HCV initiative or start a completely new organization and incorporate the HCV mission.
 - Include all stakeholders: community leaders and institutions, partner organizations, funders, parents, youth, law enforcement and elected officials.
 - Divide organization into distinct functional areas such as Executive, Programs, Physical Environment Programming, Communication/Development and Monitoring and Evaluation to increase accountability for outcomes.
- Leverage existing organizations' strengths
 - Work with organizations such as the YMCA or Operation Better Block to determine their effectiveness before initiating a similar program.
 - Enhance successful programs like Head Start and YMCA after-school activities.
 - Build alliances beyond the neighborhood with organizations such as Youthplaces, Black Empowerment Project, Young Preservationists Association of Pittsburgh, Citiparks and Grow Pittsburgh.
- Establish shared goals and priorities and get stakeholders' buy-in
 - Some teams felt that programs should relate back to the organization's priorities. One team identified those priorities as Community Organizing, Education, Safety and Health while another cited Infrastructure, Educational Attainment and Community Pride. Another team categorized initiatives as either family-based (parenting classes, therapy, financial planning) or community-wide (community bus loop, free day care, employment assistance).
 - Identify key goals in order of priority.
 - Set both short-term and long-term goals.
- Identify and adopt best practices from similar local initiatives
 - In addition to replicating some of the HCZ's strategies, a few teams thought it was important to look at other, local initiatives for lessons learned (e.g., the Race Street Project, which focuses primarily on the physical environment or the Rosedale Block Cluster, a very specific area of focus).

2. Hire a dedicated staff

Most teams thought the HCV was going in the right direction by organizing a steering committee in the early stages of the initiative, but advocated for hiring qualified, full-time staff to implement programs.

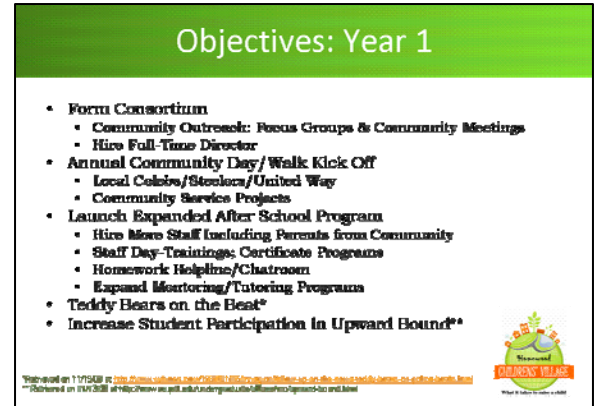


Figure 5: Homewood: Change from Within (Fort Pitt)

Figure 6: Homewood Children's Village 5-Year Strategic Plan (Veteran's)

3. Create a database for information storing and/or sharing

Teams felt that a cross-organizational database that enables services providers to both track all services children are receiving and chart their progress was a necessary component. Other teams saw this as an opportunity to create a data warehouse for Homewood residents to access information about community activities and/or job opportunities and training.

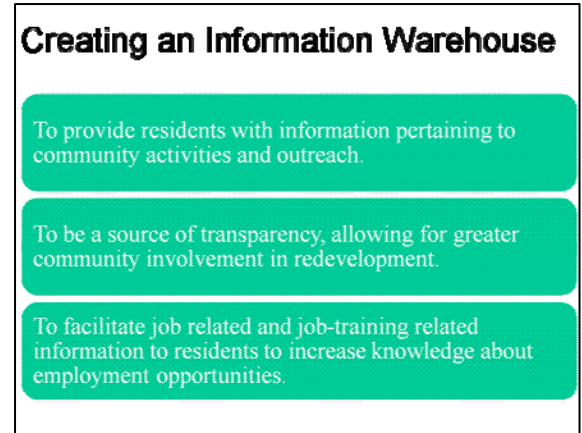
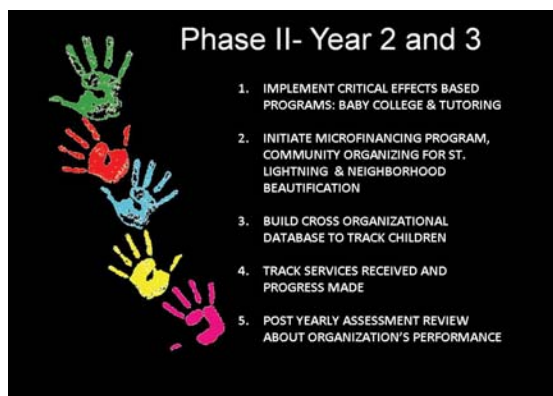


Figure 7: Homewood: Change from Within (Fort Pitt)

Figure 8: Promise Neighborhood and Addressing Structural Poverty to Improve Children's Lives (Liberty)

Case Findings

4. Consistently evaluate programs

All of the teams mentioned measurable outcomes in their presentations although benchmarks for success differed. In addition to typical metrics such as funds raised and people served, some examples were:

- Increase in:
 - standardized test scores
 - number of students in AP courses
 - new businesses
 - number of parents involved with their child's school
 - attendance at community meetings
 - median property value
 - graduation rate
 - student enrollment

- Decrease in:
 - infant mortality
 - teen pregnancies
 - school violence
 - childhood obesity

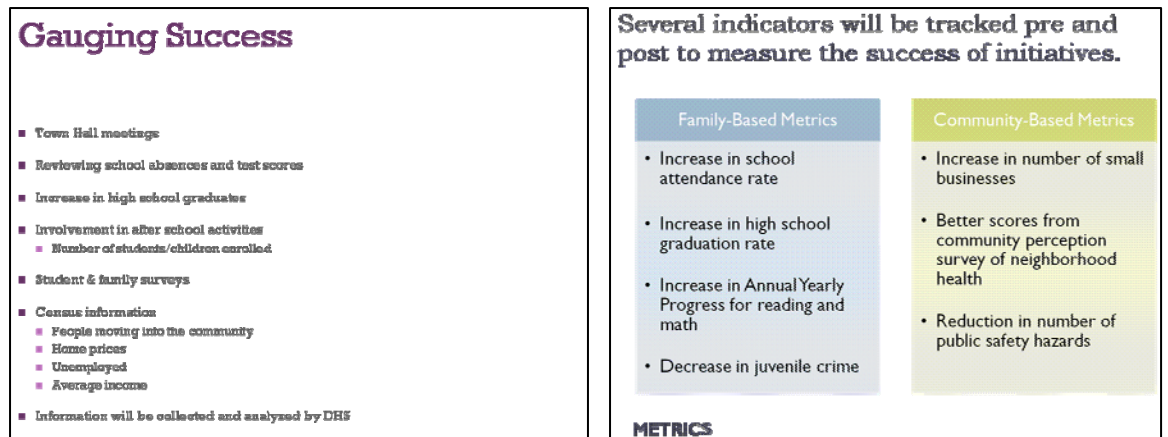


Figure 9: Homewood Economic Revitalization Organization (Hot Metal)

Figure 10: A Strategy for Community Growth & Child Development in Homewood (Bloomfield)

5. Conduct outreach

Involve parents and community members at every phase of implementation.

- Community meetings
 - Hold frequently and stagger times and locations to increase attendance
- Multi-faceted approach
 - Reach people where they are comfortable—web site, door knocking, leaflets/flyers, phone calls—and increase community participation

Community Action Meetings

- Locations:
 - Homewood Public Library—South
 - Faison Primary School—South
 - Baptist Temple of Race St.—North
 - Westinghouse High—West
- Frequency: Bi-weekly for first four meetings over two months
- Publicity: Canvas, literature drop, flyering
- Partners: Schools, libraries, YMCA, churches

Promote parent engagement through three main initiatives

- Outreach
 - Connect and Network Parents
- Parenting Skills
 - Modeled after “Baby College”
 - Focused on new and expecting parents
 - Parents are compensated to attend
- Nutrition
 - Information and Access

Figure 11: The Raise Up Alliance (Ft. Duquesne)

Figure 12: DHS Case Competition: Homewood Children’s Village (West End)

6. Maintain focus on education

The foundation for about half of the teams’ plans was educational improvement. They recommended that the HCV dedicate most of its resources to parent-child initiatives for the first five years. Staying true to the HCZ model, some teams said that they would establish a pipeline of services beginning with successful programs such as “Baby College” while others recommended devoting more funding to other areas of focus including:

- Preparing children for kindergarten
- Halting declining achievement at particularly vulnerable times in a child’s life (one team identified this as third through eighth grade)
- Increasing the amount of mentor programs in the neighborhood
- Educating parents
- Training teachers
- Developing more innovative curricula

Case Finding

CAFÉ + BOOKS=LIFELONG LITERACY

- Neighborhood cafe and “gently used” bookstore
 - Workshops: Kids corner, The Reading Family, Tween Time, Grandma knows Best, Pops and Me
 - Events: Artist exhibits, Homewood Poetry Jams, local band performances
 - AmeriCorps presence
- Goals: Improve literacy by making reading fun and accessible for all ages and skill levels
- Outcomes: Higher academic performance, economic development
- Costs: \$\$ (partially self-funded)

Children: Halt declining achievement from grades 3 to 8

- An after-school program for grades 3 – 8
- Improve reading and math skills
- Integrated to curriculum at Faison
- Incorporate alternative learning styles
- Evaluate children at the beginning and end of the year

Figure 13: A Conceptual Plan for the Homewood Children's Village (Highland Park)

Figure 14: DHS Case Competition: Homewood Children's Village (West End)


7. Address health and safety issues

Lack of safety and inadequate access to health care can be major obstacles to student achievement. About half of the student teams attempted to address health and safety issues that plague children in Homewood and provided suggestions on how to address them.

- Health
 - Open a small clinic in Westinghouse High School.
 - Incorporate nutrition and physical activity into curriculum at all Homewood area schools.
 - Work with parents or caregivers to ensure that every child enrolled in public school go to a doctor or dentist at least once per year.
- Safety
 - Develop a relationship/alliance with local law enforcement.
 - Start block watches.
 - Educate parents about abuse.
 - Improve street lighting.

Case Findings

Prevention: Health



- Nurse-Family Partnership program
 - Home Visitation
 - Pregnancy-2 years of age
 - Improves pre-natal health and pregnancy outcomes
 - Parent development
 - Long Term Effects (Parents): 31% fewer subsequent births, fewer months on welfare, 44% fewer behavioral problems due to alcohol/drug abuse, 69% fewer arrests
 - Long Term Effects (Children): 56% less likely to have been arrested, 80% less likely to have been convicted of a criminal violation
 - Implemented by DHS (children, youth, and families)
 - Decreased stigma

Bartollas, C. (2006). *Juvenile Delinquency*. New York, NY: Pearson Publishing.

“MOTHERS WATCH” CAMPAIGN

- Neighborhood-based reporting system
 - Women in the community
 - Active and visible presence
 - Dialogue with local authorities
- Goals: Encourage reporting crime and gang-related activity, starting with the matriarchs of the community
- Outcomes: Decreased violent and property-related crime, increased community solidarity, instilled sense of safety and community support
- Costs: \$

Figure 15: Homewood Economic Revitalization Organization (Hot Metal)

Figure 16: A Conceptual Plan for the Homewood Children’s Village (Highland Park)

The Raise Up Alliance will seek to better the health of children in Homewood schools.

- Strategic alliance with PittMed, UPMC, AGH
- School visits
- Free to children with parental consent

Summary of Recommendations

Improve the physical environment

- Commit to eliminating blight around Homewood schools first.
- Impose fines on property owners (Implied Warrant of Habitability) until they fix unsafe conditions.
- Winterize/secure empty houses and buildings.
- Convert vacant lots into green space.

Figure 17: The Raise Up Alliance (Ft. Duquesne)

Figure 18: DHS Case Competition: Homewood Children’s Village (West End)

8. Improve the physical environment

The third-place team put improving the “built environment” at the top of their list of recommendations for the HCV and most teams addressed neighborhood blight somewhere in their plans.

- Dilapidated buildings and houses
 - Commit to eliminating blight around Homewood schools first.
 - Impose fines on property owners (Implied Warrant of Habitability) until they fix unsafe conditions.
 - Winterize/secure empty houses and buildings.
 - Start an Adopt-a-Block program.
 - Address graffiti.

- Vacant lots
 - Convert into green space.
 - Create Community Heritage space with statues and plaques depicting influential Homewood residents.

- Urban farming
 - Involve youth as part of an after-school program.
 - Increase consumption of healthier foods.
 - Contribute to neighborhood beautification.

Additional Opportunities for Vacant Land

- Deconstruction, not demolition
 - Utilize Construction Junction
 - Neighborhood committee
- Winterizing/Securing Empty Properties
- Neighborhood Clean-up
 - “Adopt-A-Neighborhood” or “Adopt-A-Block”
- Youth Involvement
 - Organized Clean-up Activities
 - Integrate into Schools
 - Weekly Community Updates

Improve the physical environment

- ▣ Short-term:
 - ▣ Collaborate with MLK Community Mural Project to involve Homewood students in community beautification
- ▣ Long-term:
 - ▣ Work with MLK to establish a Homewood branch that will incorporate Homewood’s heritage and showcase “home town heroes”
 - ▣ Convert buildings from city to tenant ownership
 - ▣ Partner with Grow Pittsburgh
 - ▣ Transform vacant lots into community gardens
 - ▣ Work with schools to create “Edible Schoolyard”

Figure 19: Promise Neighborhood and Addressing Structural Poverty to Improve Children’s Lives (Liberty)

Figure 20: Finding a Future for Homewood (Rankin)

Case Findings

9. Diversify funding to work toward sustainability

Most teams suggested a diversified funding model and included the federal government, state and local government and foundations as potential funding sources.

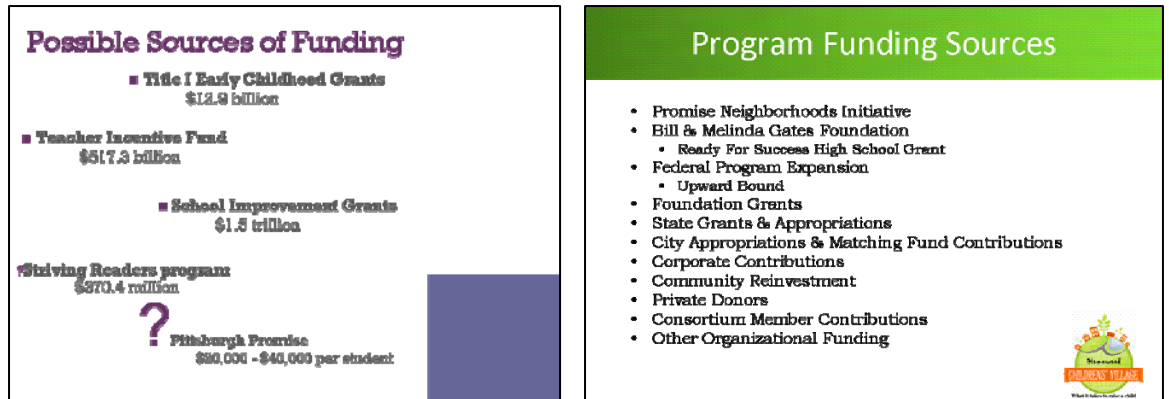


Figure 21: Homewood Economic Revitalization Organization (Hot Metal)

Figure 22: Homewood Children's Village 5-Year Strategic Plan (Veteran's)

10. Miscellaneous

Some suggestions did not fit into general categories, but were unique and worth mentioning.

- Micro financing for homeownership.
- Land banks to focus on converting vacant and abandoned properties into productive use.
- Community bus loop encircling the Homewood business district and connecting north Homewood to the existing bus way.
- An alternative high school completion program for new and expectant mothers.
- A mural arts program to both combat graffiti and provide a creative outlet for youth.
- Professional engineers and architects engage high school students to remodel a vacant property and convert it into a greenhouse.
- Formation of a teen executive board including teens, DHS staff and community leaders to help fix houses, paint over graffiti and transform empty lots into community gardens.

WALKING SCHOOL BUS PROGRAM

- **An innovative way to make getting to school a safe and fun experience**
 - Adult "driver"
 - Launch October 6, 2010, International Walk to School Day
 - Rain or shine: Safe daily pickup & drop-off
- **Goals: Build positive peer networks, improve school attendance and protect children**
- **Outcomes: Instill pride in the community as a pioneer in the Pittsburgh region**
- **Costs: \$**

Building Alliances

- Publicity campaign
- Media coverage
 - Positive, action focus
 - Television
 - Radio
 - Internet
 - Newspaper
- The political loop
 - Inform representatives
 - Mayor Ravenstahl's Youth Council

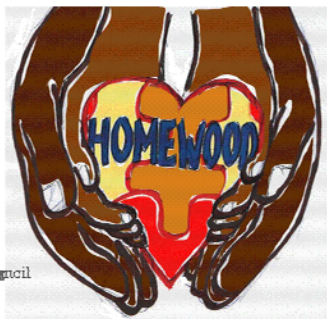


Figure 23: A Conceptual Plan for the Homewood Children's Village (Highland Park)

Figure 24: Homewood has Heart (Birmingham)

Case Findings

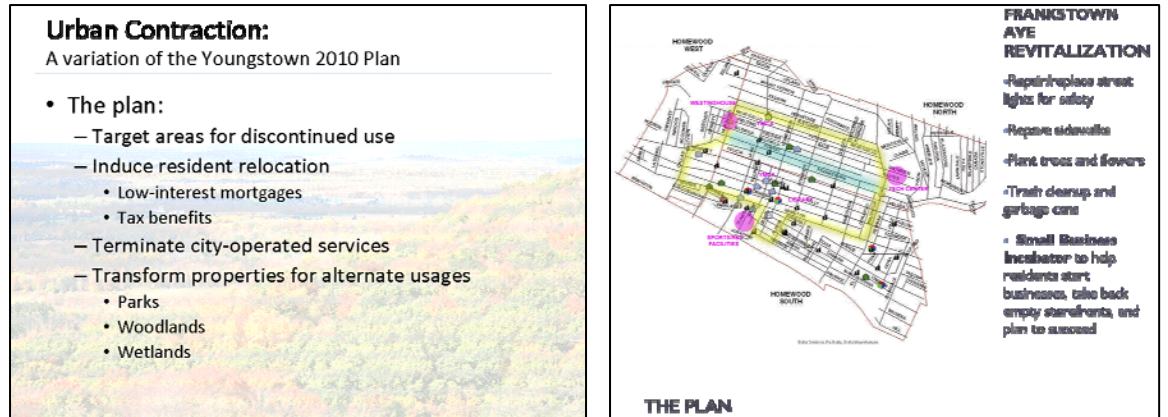


Figure 25: Homewood: Breaking Barriers to Success and Building Community Pride (Andy Warhol)

Figure 26: A Strategy for Community Growth & Child Development in Homewood (Bloomfield)

Conclusions and Recommendations

DHS values input about the case competition provided by judges and students and solicits their feedback in a variety of ways. In addition to survey results from the 2009 participants, a focus group—composed of DHS staff, student participants, and judges—convened in January 2010 to discuss the content and depth of the case, logistics and timing of the competition, team formation, judge selection, judging criteria and scoring, and prizes for participants. DHS will use the collective feedback to capitalize on the strengths of the 2009 competition and make improvements to some of the areas where survey respondents and focus group participants see a need.

SURVEY RESULTS

Students' Feedback

Overall, students report a positive experience with the case competition.

- 99 percent either agreed or strongly agreed that the experience was positive.
- More than 85 percent liked being assigned to an interdisciplinary team.
- More than 95 percent thought that the case was both interesting and challenging.
- Almost 60 percent thought judges were fair and over 76 percent felt that their interaction with judges was positive.
- More than 70 percent agreed that they would participate in another case competition.

Students thought that the event was well-managed.

- More than 87 percent believed that DHS staff members were effective in managing the event.
- More than 86 percent found the meeting locations to be adequate.
- More than 93 percent thought that the refreshments were sufficient.
- More than 78 percent felt the prizes were appropriate.

Despite generally positive feedback, students identified several ways in which the competition could have been improved:

- 10 percent of students did not think that the event was effectively managed.
- 10 percent did not like being assigned to an interdisciplinary team.
- 7 percent did not feel that the meeting locations were adequate.

Written Comments

In addition to the aforementioned responses, students provided written comments contained in Appendix A.

Judges' Feedback

Judges were very positive when providing feedback about the case competition.

- Over 90 percent of judges agreed or strongly agreed that the experience was positive.
- 100 percent agreed that they would participate in the event again.
- More than 87 percent of judges agreed or strongly agreed that the interaction with students was positive.

Judges also thought the case was interesting and challenging:

- More than 82 percent of the judges thought the case was challenging and all of them considered it interesting.

Judges agreed that the event was well-managed:

- 100 percent agreed that DHS staff members were effective in managing the event.
- 100 percent felt that the meeting location was adequate.
- 94 percent agreed or strongly agreed that the refreshments were sufficient.

Although judges appreciated the case challenge enough to participate again and thought it was managed well, they were ambivalent about it as a means to recruit students. Twelve percent agreed the competition was useful for recruiting while 75 percent neither agreed nor disagreed.

Written Comments

In addition to the aforementioned responses, judges provided written comments contained in Appendix A.

FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

The focus group, convening two months after the competition, was a roundtable discussion between student participants, judges and DHS staff. DHS staff members took note of the strengths and opportunities for improvement that were mentioned and will incorporate them into planning the 2010 competition. Results are summarized below.

Focus group participants included:

- Two judges from the 2009 competition (one of the judges was also a 2008 case competition participant)
- Two student participants
- Seven DHS staff members that attended both rounds of competition presentations and monitored judges' deliberations.

Strengths

Interdisciplinary teams

This year, DHS extended the scope of the competition by inviting students from disciplines in business, law and public health to participate. Overwhelmingly, focus group participants thought this was a positive addition to the competition. Although there were concerns expressed directly to DHS staff from students in these disciplines that the HCV issue did not have an obvious law or business component, DHS staff pointed out that creative ideas emerged from these students as a result of approaching the problem from a different perspective.

DHS communication with case competition participants

DHS tries to ensure it is clear and consistent in communications with students and judges during the application process, leading up to the events that make up the entire competition and on the actual day of the competition. Focus group participants all agreed that they were well-informed about case competition rules and logistical details.

Case topic

Opinions about the specifics of the case varied slightly, but focus group participants overwhelmingly agreed that the HCV case was interesting and challenging. As is mentioned throughout the report, students and judges alike were intrigued by the grassroots nature of the organization and were enthusiastic about the prospect of actually seeing their ideas implemented.

Opportunities for improvement

Networking

Responding to student feedback from previous years, DHS built an extra hour into the 2009 Case Competition Opening Reception schedule for students to network with each other and with the judges *before* teams were assigned and case specifications were reviewed. Although students in the focus group did not object to the idea of networking, they would have preferred to use the time to network with the members of their case competition teams *after* team assignments were announced.

Timing

Timing is an issue that arises each year in post-competition feedback and although DHS has attempted to accommodate the majority of students' schedules, it is impossible to schedule the competition at the optimal time of year for everyone. Students in the focus group mentioned holding the competition either earlier in the fall or perhaps in the winter, but ultimately agreed that those two options wouldn't work for all participants either.

In terms of the actual competition timeframe, student focus group participants thought maybe giving teams a week to meet and work on the case instead of just two days would be beneficial. DHS staff considered this, but said that the tight timeframe was actually part of the challenge.

Feedback

Although teams that did not move on to the final round of presentation were able to stay and watch the four teams that did, focus group participants said they were not aware this was an option and would have liked to have seen the winning presentations. Further, students in the focus groups would have liked more critical feedback from judges and DHS staff about their presentations. Although all teams received feedback from DHS staff via e-mail after the competition, there was a concern that the criticism was not as constructive and useful as it could have been.

SURVEY FEEDBACK

Students' Comments

- The most attractive aspect of the competition dynamics was the interdisciplinary composition of each team and the fact that the teams were randomly assigned served as an additional intriguing factor.
- Overall, this was a fantastic experience. It was an exciting problem with real implications which made investing time and energy well worth it.
- Great experience overall! Good overall experience.
- Great case! Very relevant and necessary.
- The experience overall was great. My concern for the future of the village is many "organizations" populate the zone. "Connections" needs serious overview. Powerful idea.
- I really enjoyed the process this year (I also participated last year).
- This was a very positive and rewarding experience. Our group won whatever the outcome.
- While the idea of the kickoff reception was good getting from work to the location by 6 was challenging, it might be helpful to move the start time back to 6:30.
- The case was relevant and extremely interesting. The interdisciplinary teams are fantastic because everyone brings something different to the table. Thank you to DHS & the judges for this wonderful learning experience.
- Nice team. I really appreciate that I worked with such a great team. I've learned a lot from them.
- This was a great experience. I loved the case. I felt that you had the chance to impact a local community. It was also nice to interact with students from other schools/programs. I would do it again next year.
- Thanks! It was a nice time.
- I really enjoyed this experience - prize winners or not- this case really spoke to issues prevalent in Pittsburgh and it was great to tackle the issue. My group was really effective and we all worked hard. I'm happy to have had a part of the impact soon to come in Homewood and I will continue to look for opportunities to get involved in the future. Thank you all.
- Good experience overall - challenging case and good interaction with members from other schools.
- Overall this was a good experience. I loved meeting people from other schools and grappling with a real and troubling local issue...However, the program was a very enlightening and a worthwhile experience. I learned a lot and enjoyed the experience. Thank you!

Students' Comments (cont.)

- The case competition is a great idea but maybe with a little more time, every group can produce better proposals and solutions.
- This was an amazing experience! I feel like my team assignment was good and we worked well together. I wish we had 25-30 minutes presentation. We had so many ideas and not enough time to discuss them. Thank you for this opportunity.
- Perhaps you may hear many comments on the intensity of the organizational process... I believe that it encourages immediate team focus and possibly team bonding, but to truly produce innovative and useful ideas, the addition of one day would be useful.
- From #8 [was case challenging], my work (employment) is challenging and I have been at it for over 20 years. So I appreciate and enjoy a challenge. My work also is with youth from all over the Pittsburgh area, including Homewood, so it is exciting to be able to potentially be a part of bringing something positive to my students' community. The social academic networking was enriching. I appreciate the passion that was felt from my team members who come from other academic disciplines than my own and also the diversity of our group's cultural backgrounds. Thank you for the opportunity!
- The other students were fantastic. It was wonderful to meet people doing this work already. So networking opportunities were fantastic.
- Initially, I was concerned with how the competition was structured. However, after going through this process, I am glad I participated. This has been a fantastic learning experience.
- Even though there was a lot of work to be done, I really enjoyed the case competition. Compared to the previous two years, I think this year's case is very challenging and not too general. I liked the team members in my group and the different backgrounds we brought to the table. Very positive experience. Exactly what I want as a policy student; addressing a policy issue in our community. Great topic and well-diverse staff/judges. Positive experience and exposure to DHS. It's at the top of my places I want to intern at.

Students' Suggestions

- I might consider hosting the competition early in the fall semester- perhaps late September- early October before the "crunch" time that sets in for many students in Mid-November.
- I think the schedule could be tighter- it was nice to have some networking time Thursday but an hour was too much. One hour for breakfast and announcements is too much on Saturday. It would be helpful if nametags had school/program affiliations and that if judges' nametags identified them as judges.
- More time- we introduced ourselves and that was counted in our 20 minutes, so we were cut off prematurely. Feedback from judges.
- I felt that the case was more of "social service" type/ would have preferred some "business/management" twist.
- Prior to beginning the case competition, our group was asked to exchange introductions with the judges. I'm not sure if this time was part of the 20 minutes allotted for presentation. If it was, it may be better (ideal for groups at least) to be extended 25 minutes for the total presentation.
- Possible suggestions- increase time limit to 30-35 minutes when dealing with a case with such a large scope. Provide more feedback.
- We could use more preparation time.
- The topic was great, but don't tell us not to focus on funding and have judges ask about specific entities to draw funding from and very specific funding questions.
- I think that for the amount of effort that was put into this project and the scope of issues that needed to be addressed, that 20 minutes was not enough time for the presentation
- Arrange each event closer, coming one next another. Reduce wasting time, because we are all busy. Prefer quicker pace. Thanks.
- It would have been nice if the groups that did not win receive feedback. It also would have been nice to sit in on the final presentations.
- It would be nice to find a way to hear what suggestions other groups have. It would also be nice to receive more feedback from the judges about our presentations and suggestions. Introduce the judges and where they work before hand so that students can seek out relevant people to talk to/network with based on their interests and the judges' backgrounds.
- Be able to see all four finalists' PowerPoints after the competition/ Get a feedback sheet on our specific proposal from the judges to be able to learn from it and do better in the future.
- It would have been nicer to present on less information so the presentation and judge interaction could be more relaxed and less rushed. More specific problem concerning Homewood.

Students' Suggestions (cont.)

- Water for speakers- due to heat, I almost passed out. I think water over juices for breakfast would be sufficient.
- Waiting for results was too long. Meeting processes could have been faster.
- Too many long time gaps during competition day.
- The first meeting on Thursday should be in Oakland since most students seem to be from Pitt and CMU.
- Might be better to give students a week, especially since we all live in the area. Consider having speaker or something during lunch so it doesn't feel like as much waiting. Increase amount of time allowed for presentation, especially considering huge scope of project. Have something planned for during one-hour breakfast if it is mandatory to be there that early. Make evals more anonymous.
- It would be helpful in the future to have a bit more time so that we don't lose as much sleep.
- I would reduce the amount of dead time between first rounds and finals
- I think it might be interesting to conduct the competition more similar to a poster session- where groups have the opportunity to understand other groups' presentations and ideas. Possibly could only have a limited time period before they were due and then a week later you'd have them printed and we'd present. I think you need to be more explicit about the time expectations. I had no idea so much time was expected Friday and would have planned differently if I had. I had to work Friday and it made things more difficult and now I've only had about 8 hours of sleep over 2 days (which I feel is unhealthy and unsafe
- First, I believe that the timing was awful. Students are extremely busy this time of year. The quality of what you receive is influenced by the timing you choose. Beware. Second, re: "other student." I wouldn't recommend allowing everyone to participate unless you make clearer there are 4 on a team. Because some students are at different capacities, when you reduce team numbers, if time is an issue, 1 or 2 students must work to incorporate someone into the program rather than working on a solution to the problem at hand. Third, if all my peers worked with me, I would be able to produce a better result. We all feel similarly. Therefore, interdisciplinary approaches, though good for networking and individual enrichment, may produce quite poor results compared to what you may obtain otherwise. Fourth, allow people to construct their own teams of 4 if they would like.

Students' Suggestions (cont.)

- We found, and other groups confirmed, that the judges' questions didn't center on what we understood the question to be. Make sure DHS and the judges are on the same page. One judge had his eyes closed during our presentation. While he wasn't asleep, I found this disrespectful. Since most students are based in Oakland, consider having all the full-group meetings there rather than downtown. Consider moving the final meeting later by a few hours. Make it a lunch-dinner, rather than a breakfast-lunch event. We're all overworked grad students and could use a bit more time to sleep.
- I was expecting a case more applicable to my academic interests. I think the case should encompass issues that are representative of the participants. I think that there should be more information about the amount of time this project would take.
- I would give the teams an extra hour of two sleep on Saturday- maybe start the presentations at 9 or 10am instead of 8am. We worked until 1am- getting up at 7am was rough. Also, I would plan the event for the beginning of 2nd semester rather than the end of 1st semester. Finals month is a hard time to fit this in.
- Would it be good to have some attendance gift? Since all of the participants already put a lot of effort in. I think the evaluation procedure may not be that clear since the variety of ideas/interventions are too large.
- Introducing the topic on a Wednesday night, for example, would permit participants to better understand their subject. Proposing a solution for a problem that is foreign is a difficult- even overwhelming- task. Situational problems require consideration of many influencing factors to tailor solutions.
- The information on Homewood was rather vague. I would have liked more information on what specific services were already available in the Homewood community. I don't know that I added value to the HCV planning team.
- I think that the meeting place should be near the universities and not downtown.
- Critique: I think the case should've been presented to us Friday night, be able to work on the project Saturday and present Sunday. With having it on Friday we had to deal with people having class, meetings, and work. In the real world, you don't have this obstacle because your team works for the same organization and have similar schedules. Having it on a Saturday ensure teams can take advantage of the full day.

Judges' Comments

- I have concerns about the pre-session materials. The Homewood community profile was deficit based with no reference to assets and resources.
- Great concept, good execution although our teams were somewhat weak.
- Thanks for doing this competition. It's so great. The networking time- for me to meet other judges and for us to talk to students- is invaluable. It is ample during today's schedule.
- Great job!
- Solutions were lacking, but students were enthusiastic.
- The students should have been presented with a more specific challenge. Most simply regurgitated the Harlem model. The case study should have emphasized Homewood very specifically and very specific, neighborhood-level challenges. Presentations were too theoretical and too repetitive of HCZ model. Perhaps drilling down one level would have helped, with specific challenges around implementation, accountability of partners, establishment.
- Excellent event, excellent case! Keep up the great work!
- Suggest when each panel announces its finalist that the announcer mentions positive points about each group. Give judges a notebook up front that includes all score sheets, agenda with locations and evaluation form and provide a guide to the day and rules. Twist needs to be carefully worded with some extra directions (i.e. the foundation has not heard any of your material). Have someone emcee the day.
- I think it would be good to have the final round in a room where the other students could watch. I was not impressed by the solutions the students came up with for the most part. I was expecting more creativity and compelling community connection. However, this is a hard topic and one that has been debated for years; given this, I think the students did a decent job. They certainly had an opportunity to showcase their talents.
- Only participated in the 2nd half of the session, so maybe this was offered, but another approach is to make subject matter experts available to the teams for input with a limited scope of information to share. Perhaps via Q&A panel on the opening night or a conf call on the day between the kickoff and the competition day, but that might help the students stay on track to produce the anticipated range of proposals being targeted.
- Coffee sucks; very challenging case; great locale; mix with community was interesting and challenging.

FOCUS GROUP COMMENTS

- I thought the project was well-timed and well placed.
- People with previous Pittsburgh experience had more of an edge because they may have had more of a familiarity with Homewood.
- I really enjoyed it.
- Judging feedback wasn't as much as what people wanted. We would have liked to have known what made the winning group better than ours.
- We weren't sure if we were allowed to stay for the final round of competition. Even people that didn't make it wanted to see what the winning presentations looked like. It wasn't clear if we could stay and listen.
- I would have liked to have heard what was said in the final round. What made the winning team stand out? The judges did say nice things about our team in the follow-up, but then why did the winning team win?
- I appreciated the interdisciplinary nature of the teams. It was great having a different mix, different perspectives and different experiences.
- The networking was nice. Maybe you could use the time to let teams to get to know each other. Assign teams before networking.
- Maybe add a day to let us pick our own teams.
- Give team assignment a day early so that teams can get together sooner.
- The breath of the topic was daunting. We knew that the presentation could only be a certain length so we felt we were limited.
- You almost gave us too much background information.
- The vision and mission of DHS flowed well.
- I certainly have a better understanding of DHS, but not sure there was a clear link between HCV and DHS.
- Maybe you can market the competition in the fall and then hold the competition in January.
- The competition is a lot of work so incentives go a long way.
- The zip drives [as a gift] were awesome.
- The case was challenging on many levels. Perhaps too daunting a degree of difficulty.
- Good DHS promo. A clear connection of DHS's role in the community.
- Mentioning HCZ as a national model may have been confusing.
- Perhaps it could have been clearer whether students were being asked for a planning solution or a program solution. Tying the two together was a challenge.
- More students' could have addressed how DHS could be more support or help with this [the HCV] model.
- It was good that DHS avoided the school issue when setting up the case.

FOCUS GROUP COMMENTS (cont.)

- Judges that came from the Homewood community and were already doing the work may have had a different viewpoint—a more defined vision and leaned toward students who aligned with their vision (i.e., unintentional bias).
- Ratings procedures varied; it may have been better to objectively score.
- The presentations as a whole were not as strong as in years' past perhaps because of case topic difficulty.
- The second round of judging could have completely new judges for more subjective judging. For example, this year the case challenge asked required students' to shorten their original presentation and tailor it to funders so why not have actual funders judging?
- Maybe to get a better student commitment, stretch the case competition out over a one-week period. A not-as-intense 48 hrs can leave room for more networking.
- I thought it was well-structured and well-organized. It was interesting to work with students from other schools. I would have liked guidelines for the final round to be written and handed to the groups and with more detailed information (such as...make changes or use existing ppt slides). In addition to feedback, it would be nice to have some positive comments or explanation about what was unique or impressive about the presentation other than just things that could have been better. This case worked well for social work and public policy students. I'm not sure about business/law students.
- Either the competition should last for an additional day, or participants should be given the option of indicating their preferences for team members (or have people sign up teams, instead of being assigned by DHS)...the biggest challenge was trying to get to know people, their styles, their strengths and weaknesses, in the 48 hrs we had to also produce a quality product and get everyone on the same page. Otherwise, the benefit of doing case competitions is getting the feedback from the judges...it would be good if feedback were provided in some manner the same day as the judging. That way people can improve. Handwritten, copied notes would be fine.
- We received no feedback on our presentation. Thought we would get a full report and we haven't.
- Evaluation wasn't useful. We were not able to tell the fairness of the judges because we weren't sure what criteria we were being judged on.
- The case was very interesting, engaging and applicable.
- Enjoyed the experience.
- Next year—hope it's again application and can make a real impact.