

2017 Allegheny County Annual Local Government Case Competition: Money to the People



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The Allegheny County
Department of Human Services
One Smithfield Street
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15222

PHONE 412.350.5701
FAX 412.350.4004

www.alleghenycountyanalytics.us

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INTRODUCTION

Each year, the Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS) hosts a competition for local graduate students. Generously funded by the Human Services Integration Fund,¹ the competition challenges interdisciplinary teams of students to learn about a problem facing local government and develop innovative solutions, which they present to a panel of judges.

1 The Human Services

Integration Fund is a group of local foundations that provide flexible funding to DHS for projects that foster integration and support innovation.

2017 marked the 11th year that DHS has hosted the Case Competition. This year's topic, "Rethinking Human Services Delivery: Money to the People," asked students to envision a future where DHS would distribute funds directly to Allegheny County residents in need.

Seventy-three students representing four local universities and 10 different programs of study participated in this year's competition. Judges from foundations, universities, nonprofits and government agencies volunteered their time and expertise to judge the competition and provide feedback to students.

THE COMPETITION

In 2007, DHS celebrated its 10th anniversary. As part of that anniversary celebration, DHS instituted the Local Government Case Competition, which has become an annual event. The Case Competition has been an ideal way to give graduate students an opportunity to apply what they are learning in school to real social issues. It also encourages students to consider careers in the public sector; in fact, several past participants have gone on to hold internships and jobs with DHS, the City of Pittsburgh and other local nonprofits.

As in past years, this year's Case Competition commenced with a reception on a Wednesday at which team assignments were made and the topic was announced. Students and judges heard remarks from two guest speakers: Fred Thieman, the Henry Buhl, Jr. Chair for Civic Leadership with the Buhl Foundation and former United States Attorney for the Western District of Pennsylvania; and Tammy Thompson, co-owner/operator of Thompson Real Estate Consulting, Family Care Coordinator at Circles East Liberty, and producer of the documentary, *We Wear the Mask: The Hidden Face of Women in Poverty*. The case was introduced by DHS Deputy Director Erin Dalton.

Student teams then had Wednesday evening through Saturday morning to research, brainstorm and prepare their recommendations. On Saturday, the teams gave 20-minute presentations to one of five panels of judges and were judged on presentation content, presenter skills, visuals and overall impression. The top team from each panel moved on to the final round, in which teams repeated their presentations to all judges and were then awarded prizes for first through fifth place.

THE 2017 CASE

In the current human services system, local governments like Allegheny County design and deliver services for vulnerable people experiencing challenges in areas such as aging, mental health, drug and alcohol addiction, intellectual disability, housing, and child welfare. On the other hand, one of DHS's guiding principles is to recognize the capacity of individuals and families to identify their own strengths, needs and goals, and take the steps necessary to accomplish these goals. With this in mind, the case challenged students to consider whether the government is in the best position to offer solutions to people, or if people should decide for themselves the best ways to address their own needs.

The students' specific task was to envision a future where DHS would distribute funds directly to Allegheny County residents in need. Students were asked to propose a pilot program for disbursing the funds to a particular population, describe the pros and cons of their proposed strategy, present potential risks and how they would mitigate them, and detail how success would be evaluated.

Teams were instructed to propose solutions that would address one of these DHS program areas:

- **Aging** services for people 60 years and older, seeking to live safe, healthy and, when possible, independent lives
- **Homelessness and housing** services for people experiencing unstable housing
- **Child welfare and family support** programs and services for families to prevent safety risks that would require child protective services to remove a child from their parents' home
- **Re-entry** services for people who are or have been incarcerated

THE WINNING SOLUTIONS

The five finalists offered a variety of recommendations that included placing smartphones and money in the hands of people re-entering the community after time in the Allegheny County Jail; a one-year direct cash assistance program to promote maternal and child health; and cash transfers to improve health outcomes for elderly, low-income adults. See **Appendix A** on page 6 for a summary of all proposed solutions.



FIRST PLACE
Team Greenfield — Mothers Together

Team Greenfield proposed a program called “Mothers Together,” which would assist expectant mothers living just above the poverty line by providing monthly cash transfers conditional upon program attendance and meeting personal goals. The program would be available to approximately 500 expectant mothers whose income was from 136 percent to 150 percent of the federal poverty level. This group was chosen because they make too much to qualify for federal benefits but do not make a living wage.

DHS would provide a monthly debit card with a baseline sum of money to each participant as long as they attended weekly cohort meetings. The baseline amount would be calculated separately for each individual so that it would bring each participant up to the level of a living wage. In addition to baseline funds, incentive funds, up to \$200 per month, would be available and tied to individuals’ goals (such as opening a savings account, going to postnatal doctor visits or attending a job fair). Participants would work with case managers who manage group meetings and help with individual skills and goal-setting.

FIGURE 1: “Mothers Together” Cohort System





SECOND PLACE

Team West End — Finance for Families

This proposal offers one-year, direct-cash assistance to selected families who are involved with the County’s Family Support Centers. Two hundred families would receive \$320 per month, increasing the average family’s spending power by 30 percent. The participating families would also be eligible for a one-time \$500 crisis grant to cover unexpected emergencies. Families would receive additional support through online networking with other families and in-person events.



THIRD PLACE

Team Veterans — Cash Benefits for Low-Income Seniors

The vision of this project is to improve health outcomes for elderly, low-income adults, and those who care for these individuals, by providing cash benefits. The program would target participants age 60 years and older who meet requirements for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and who are not currently enrolled in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Cash transfers of \$150 per month would be delivered directly to an electronic cash assistance card (also known as an ACCESS card). Bonus dollars of up to \$30 a month would provide incentives for healthy behaviors (e.g., buying from a farmers market, filling a prescription, or signing up for a gym membership).

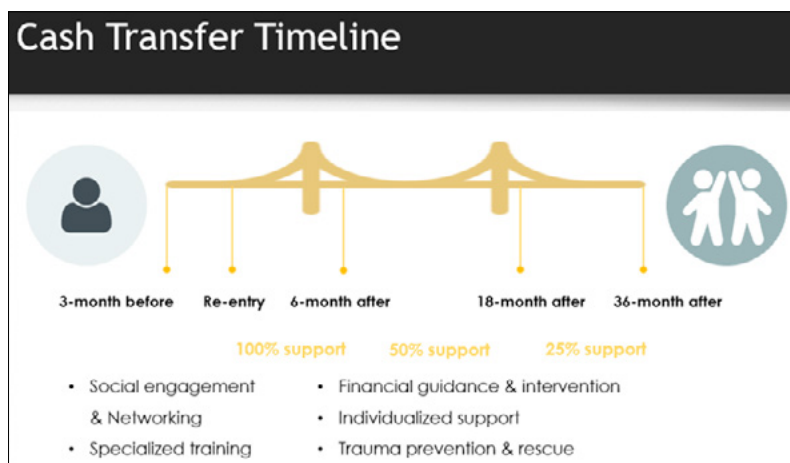


FOURTH PLACE

Team McKees Rocks — Re-Burgh: A Conditional Cash Transfer Application for Re-Entry

This proposal would bring cash transfers and spending analysis tools together with mentorship to address the challenges of people leaving the Allegheny County Jail. While in the jail, participants would meet with a mentor to establish a plan for life post-release. After release, participants would receive support to open a bank account with a partnering credit union. In order to receive cash transfers, participants would agree to regular meetings with a mentor who would help with job placement and financial goal-setting. An app would help participants track spending and alert participants and mentors of risky spending activity.

FIGURE 2: Re-Burgh Cash Transfer Timeline



**FIFTH PLACE****Team Westinghouse — Smart Money**

The Westinghouse team proposed providing people leaving the Allegheny County Jail with smartphones that would be used as a platform to provide biweekly direct deposits, and allow for the individual to be tracked. Phones would also help clients access community resources. Participants would receive \$350 per month for six months, and then \$175 per month for the remaining three months.

CONCLUSION

Developing a way to give money directly to people who need it is a challenging task, but all Case Competition teams presented thought-provoking ideas. With students' concepts in mind, DHS is exploring the possibility of developing pilot programs that incorporate cash transfers.

The annual Case Competition will be held again next year for graduate students interested in learning more about the public sector and contributing to the work of the Allegheny County Department of Human Services.

APPENDIX A: SUMMARY OF ALL TEAMS' PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

TEAM NAME AND MEMBERS	OVERVIEW OF TEAM'S SOLUTION
Aging Solutions	
<p>[3rd place] Veterans</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dyvonne Body <i>Carnegie Mellon University MSPPM-DC Candidate</i> • Kristin Free <i>University of Pittsburgh MHA Candidate</i> • David Pinski <i>Carnegie Mellon University MSPPM-DA Candidate</i> • Weikun Zheng <i>University of Pittsburgh MPA Candidate</i> 	<p>Cash Benefits for Low-Income Seniors</p> <p>The goal of this proposed solution is to improve health outcomes for elderly, low-income adults and their caregivers.</p> <p>Participants would be 60 or older, meet SNAP income requirements, and not be already enrolled in TANF. They would receive cash transfers of \$150/month to an ACCESS card, with bonus dollars provided for participating in wellness activities such as attending a physical or filling a prescription.</p>
Family Support Solutions	
<p>Birmingham</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Edoukou Aka-Ezoua <i>University of Pittsburgh SSW, MSW</i> • Drew Simmons <i>Carnegie Mellon University Heinz, MSHCPM</i> • Yining Lyu <i>University of Pittsburgh GSPIA, MPA/MSW</i> 	<p>Conferencing and Teaming Supplemental Fund</p> <p>The Conferencing and Teaming Supplemental Fund (CTSF) is an unconditional cash transfer program designed to improve outcomes for families involved with child welfare through direct financial disbursements.</p> <p>Alongside the development of their family plan, families would develop and implement a monthly budget to help meet their needs. Funds would be unconditionally distributed through a debit card and used at the family's discretion. Monthly follow-up meetings with caseworkers would give families support in meeting their discussed goals and making any necessary budget amendments.</p>
<p>Fort Duquesne</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colleen Cadman <i>Carnegie Mellon University Heinz, MPM</i> • Nicole Gans <i>Carnegie Mellon University Heinz, MSPPM</i> • Zachary Michaels <i>University of Pittsburgh SSW, MSW</i> 	<p>SmartStart</p> <p>The SmartStart program would give conditional cash transfers to county families with children who fall below 50 percent of the county's median area income.</p> <p>Families would be pre-qualified by Family Support Centers to ensure they meet income guidelines and are willing to participate in monthly check-ins with a counselor. Qualified families would be randomly selected to receive monthly payments (\$350 a month plus an additional \$100 for each additional child) via debit card over a three-year time period. In addition to attending monthly check-ins, families would be required to attend medical and dental checkups, have school-age children attend school, and maintain a job or enroll in a job search program.</p>

TEAM NAME AND MEMBERS	OVERVIEW OF TEAM'S SOLUTION
<p>Highland Park</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alexandra Abboud <i>University of Pittsburgh MSW</i> • Michael Coutinho <i>Carnegie Mellon University Heinz, MSHCPM</i> • Tongyu Yi <i>University of Pittsburgh GSPIA, MID</i> • Emily Rehfus <i>Carnegie Mellon University Heinz, MSPPM</i> 	<p>Strong Children and Families Fund</p> <p>This initiative offers a hybrid cash transfer and integrated services program to families living in poverty who are also involved with the child welfare system.</p> <p>Participants would receive financial assistance in three phases: an unconditional cash transfer of \$500 at the beginning of the program (phase 1), a 12-month conditional phase of \$100 per month, dependent on a family meeting its goals (phase 2), and finally an unconditional \$100 per month for 3 months (phase 3). Phases are meant to align with a child's placement outside of the home; phase 1 funds would help a family stabilize before a child returns home, and phases 2 and 3 would align with the child returning home and the family moving toward self-sufficiency.</p>
<p>[2nd place] West End</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nikki Blake <i>University of Pittsburgh SPH, MPH</i> • Sam Applefield <i>Chatham University Sustainability</i> • JoEllen Marsh <i>University of Pittsburgh GSPIA, MPA</i> • Lorretta Sackey <i>Carnegie Mellon University Heinz, MPPM</i> 	<p>Finance for Families</p> <p>This program would provide one-year cash assistance to 200 families. Participants would receive \$320 per month with the additional opportunity for one-time \$500 crisis grants for unexpected emergencies.</p> <p>Participants would receive additional support through online networking with other families and in-person events.</p>
<p>Panther Hollow</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • John Cordier <i>University of Pittsburgh SSW/MBA</i> • Carly Krystyniak <i>University of Pittsburgh GSPIA, MPA</i> • Alyssa Lyon <i>Carnegie Mellon University Heinz, MPPM</i> • Saige Foster <i>Chatham University Psychology</i> 	<p>The Empowerment Fund</p> <p>In this initiative, individuals or groups would submit proposals to receive direct funding to provide financial support for basic needs and projects of all sizes.</p> <p>The funds would be allocated by a community panel that is made up of a DHS case worker, a minimum of three community residents, and two community/foundation partners. Participants would be supported by a DHS case worker to connect them to the training or resources needed to accomplish their proposal. The individuals or groups receiving the funds would be asked to engage with others in the community in the form of knowledge transfer, teaching, serving or participating in an innovation showcase.</p>

TEAM NAME AND MEMBERS	OVERVIEW OF TEAM'S SOLUTION
<p>[1st place] Greenfield</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Edie Godwin <i>Carnegie Mellon University MS, Public Policy and Management</i> • Angela Wang <i>Carnegie Mellon University MDes, Interaction Design</i> • Robert Santamaria <i>Carnegie Mellon University MS, Public Policy and Management</i> 	<p>Mothers Together</p> <p>This program aims to assist expectant mothers living just above the poverty line by providing monthly cash transfers conditional upon program attendance and meeting personal goals.</p> <p>Participants would receive a monthly debit card with a baseline sum of money as long as they attend weekly cohort meetings. The baseline amount is calculated separately for each individual so that it brings each participant up to the level of a living wage. In addition to baseline funds, incentive funds, up to \$200 per month, are available and are tied to individuals' goals (e.g., opening a savings account, attending postnatal visits, attending a job fair). Participants work with case managers who manage group meetings and help with individual skills and goal-setting.</p>
Re-Entry Solutions	
<p>[5th place] Westinghouse</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jody Barto <i>Chatham University Psychology</i> • Christian Spivey <i>Carnegie Mellon University Heinz, MPPM</i> • Emily Snoek <i>Carnegie Mellon University Heinz, MPPM</i> • Nancy Yi <i>University of Pittsburgh GSPIA, MPA</i> 	<p>Smart Money</p> <p>This proposal provides people leaving the Allegheny County Jail with smartphones that would be used as a platform to provide direct deposits (\$350 per month for the first six months and \$175 per month for the following three months) and allow for the individuals' locations to be tracked. Providing them with phones would also help participants access community-based resources and probation officers.</p>
<p>Fort Pitt</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brooks Carroll <i>University of Pittsburgh MSW</i> • Sean Caulfield <i>Carnegie Mellon University Heinz, MSPPM</i> • Chelsea McGraw <i>Chatham University MAP</i> • Omar Rahman <i>University of Pittsburgh GSPIA, MPH</i> 	<p>Bridge the Gap</p> <p>This program targets individuals who have higher risk of housing instability, work instability, and lack of familial supports to smooth the re-entry transition.</p> <p>Individuals who enter the program receive a pre-loaded debit card and can use their one-time cash transfer of \$2,250 as they see fit, with no conditions. The card also includes a six-month bus pass. Additionally, bonus funds are available if a person attends select support services during a specified amount of time. A partnership with a bank includes a micro "emergency" loan option, ready to disburse at low interest rates. The card can be used as a credit builder with the bank and, after six months, the individual can request a small credit line to begin to build their credit score.</p>

TEAM NAME AND MEMBERS	OVERVIEW OF TEAM'S SOLUTION
<p>Hot Metal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lucy Gillespie <i>University of Pittsburgh GSPIA, PhD/PPA</i> • Grace Luetmer <i>Carnegie Mellon University Heinz, MPPM</i> • Ryan Stannard <i>University of Pittsburgh GSPIA, MID</i> • Andrea Thieman <i>University of Pittsburgh SSW/MSW</i> 	<p>Transfer to Independence</p> <p>To achieve the dual goals of poverty alleviation and recidivism reduction, this program would provide incarcerated individuals with mediation prior to release, and cash transfers and continued access to free mediation services upon re-entry.</p> <p>Participants are required to complete at least one mediation session before release from jail. Once released, individuals will receive their monthly cash transfers on a debit card. To receive the following month's cash transfer, the participant must complete an online, phone or in-person survey designed to track progress.</p>
<p>Andy Warhol</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tiffany Babinsack <i>University of Pittsburgh GSPIA, MPA</i> • Blaine Dinkin <i>Carnegie Mellon University Heinz, MSHCPM</i> • Jinwoo Lee <i>University of Pittsburgh GSPIA, MPPM</i> • Taylor Nichols <i>University of Pittsburgh MSW</i> 	<p>The SAFER Community Initiative (Strong, Adaptable, Financially Secure, Empowered, Resilient)</p> <p>SAFER is for families with children under age 18 with a parent who is going through the re-entry process upon release from the Allegheny County Jail. Families receive \$1,000 to \$2,000 upon release, \$500 at month three, and \$500 at month six. All family members receive mentoring and counseling through partnering agencies.</p>
<p>Glenwood</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • James Burgess <i>University of Pittsburgh MSW</i> • Stephen Johnson <i>University of Pittsburgh Katz, MBA</i> • Katee Gresko <i>Chatham University MS, Counseling Psychology</i> • Laura Stephany <i>University of Pittsburgh GSPIA, MPPM</i> 	<p>Bridging the Gap: Microlending and Re-Entry</p> <p>This proposal features a microloan program in which 20 people at risk of incarceration or who were previously incarcerated receive loans of up to \$12,000. Each participant will be matched with a mentor from a local startup and participate in training related to starting a business.</p>

TEAM NAME AND MEMBERS	OVERVIEW OF TEAM'S SOLUTION
<p>Swinburne</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sarah Detweiler <i>Carnegie Mellon University Heinz, MPPM</i> • Alysse Littleberry <i>University of Pittsburgh SSW/SPH, MPH/MSW</i> • Derrick Maultsby <i>Duquesne University Law, JD</i> • Vera Zhou <i>Carnegie Mellon University Heinz, MPPM</i> 	<p>Allegheny County Chance for Change (ACCFC)</p> <p>In this program, 30 people exiting the Allegheny County Jail receive monthly cash transfers for three years, with the amount of money stepping down each year. To participate, individuals must meet with their re-entry case manager on a monthly basis to start, and every six months during the second two years of the three-year program.</p>
<p>[4th place] McKees Rocks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ashley DiGregorio <i>University of Pittsburgh GSPIA, MID</i> • Yuyun Liang <i>Carnegie Mellon University Heinz, MPM</i> • Ashley Pesi <i>University of Pittsburgh SSW, MSW</i> • Preetha Swamy <i>Carnegie Mellon University Heinz, MPPM</i> 	<p>Re-Burgh: Pipeline for a Better Pittsburgh</p> <p>This proposal brings cash transfer and consumer-focused spending analysis tools, such as Mint and Acorn, together with mentorship and rapid response behavioral and mental health support to address trauma and recidivism preventatively. Re-Burgh would partner with a credit union to establish checking accounts for each participant, with a debit card included. All account activity would be tracked and summarized through the smartphone app.</p>
<p>Fleming</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maria Soledad Cabezas <i>University of Pittsburgh GSPIA, MPPM</i> • Jennie Laeng <i>University of Pittsburgh SPH, MPH</i> • Wendy Paddock <i>University of Pittsburgh SSW, MSW</i> • Alex Temple <i>Carnegie Mellon University Heinz, MPPM</i> 	<p>Four-Point Re-Entry Program</p> <p>The proposed project is a five-month program for 20 female inmates of the Allegheny County Jail who don't qualify for the existing re-entry program. Prior to jail release, they would participate in a Trauma Recovery Empowerment Model and financial management training. Upon release, they would be connected to a caseworker at an existing community-based program for job training, parenting, D&A, education and rehabilitation. Participants would also receive a wallet with resource information, a connect card for bus transportation, and a pre-loaded card of \$1,000 that could be reloaded with \$500/month for the next four months.</p>

TEAM NAME AND MEMBERS	OVERVIEW OF TEAM'S SOLUTION
<p>Bloomfield</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emily Bippus <i>Carnegie Mellon University Heinz, MSHCPM</i> • Amanda Johnson <i>Carnegie Mellon University Heinz, MPPM</i> • Saumil Mehta <i>University of Pittsburgh GSPIA, MPH</i> • Aisha Pier <i>University of Pittsburgh SSW, MSW</i> 	<p>Empowering the Re-Entry Population Through Cash Transfers</p> <p>This proposal encompasses a mini-grants program (up to \$6,250 per participant) for 200 participants of the Allegheny County Jail Collaborative's Reentry Program. The proposed program takes place over the first five months following release. Mini-grant awards are based upon a "statement of purpose" prepared one month prior to jail release; funds are provided through Android Pay, included on a smartphone given to each participant upon release (phone bills are paid for the duration of the program). Participants will 1) meet with a caseworker who provides support, information and referral to help them achieve their goals, and 2) attend weekly peer group meetings.</p>
<p>Washington Crossing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Olivia Mundy <i>University of Pittsburgh GSPIA, MPPM</i> • Clarissa Paz <i>Carnegie Mellon University Heinz, MPPM</i> • Aarron Smith <i>Chatham University Psychology</i> • Shutong Zhang <i>University of Pittsburgh GSPIA, MPA</i> 	<p>Crossing Over Crime</p> <p>The proposed program involves randomly-selected participants involved in the Allegheny County Jail Collaborative's Reentry Program. It is integrated with the re-entry program, utilizing existing staff and monthly service plans, and adds a conditional cash transfer program, designed to accelerate re-entry, reduce recidivism, and improve transition to stable employment. Each participant receives initial funds (\$800) through a debit card and additional funds (maximum of \$800/month) based upon earning points for compliance with their monthly service plan goals.</p>
<p>Schenley</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abigail Audenried <i>Chatham University Psychology</i> • Gilbert Resendez <i>Carnegie Mellon University Heinz, MPPM</i> • Nikita Setia <i>Carnegie Mellon University Heinz, MPPM</i> • Christopher Spaniel <i>University of Pittsburgh Law, JD</i> 	<p>The Allegheny County Conditioned Cash Transfer Project (A.C.C.T.)</p> <p>This program allows participants temporary monetary assistance while they pursue goals determined with their assigned case worker. The program begins with a Needs and Risk Assessment survey to determine a baseline. Based on that, participants are given monthly monetary funds, deposited into their bank accounts, for the duration of probation or parole that, along with other supportive services, are meant to break the cycle of poverty, thereby reducing the chances of recidivism.</p>

APPENDIX B: CASE COMPETITION JUDGES AND PARTICIPATING UNIVERSITIES

Judges

Kenya Boswell	President, BNY Mellon Foundation of Southwestern PA
Michele Rone Cooper	Executive Director, McAuley Ministries Foundation
Dave Coplan	Executive Director, Human Services Center Corporation
Erin Dalton	Deputy Director, DHS Office of Data Analysis, Research and Evaluation
Jane Downing	Senior Program Officer, Pittsburgh Foundation
Lauri Fink	Senior Program Officer, Hillman Foundation
Tony Gorczyeny	Professor, Chatham University
Nakia Granberg	Communications Specialist, DHS Office of Community Relations
Lisa Johns	Treasurer and Senior Program Officer, Hillman Foundation
John Litz	Planner, DHS
Leah Lizarondo	Founder & CEO, 412 Food Rescue
Kathy McCauley	Strategic Planning Manager, DHS
Tracy Soska	Assistant Professor, University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work
Rasheena Staton	Youth Support Partner, DHS
Tammy Thompson	Owner/Operator, Thompson Real Estate Consulting
Pat Valentine	Executive Deputy Director, DHS Integrated Program Services
Chengyuan Zhou	Manager of Criminal Justice Analytics, DHS

Participants

Chatham University (7 students)

School of Psychology
Falk School of Sustainability and Environment

Carnegie Mellon University (29 students)

Heinz College
School of Design

Duquesne University (1 student)

School of Law

University of Pittsburgh (36 students)

School of Law
School of Social Work
Graduate School of Public Health
Graduate School of Public and International Affairs
Katz School of Business