



What Works Cities Economic Mobility Initiative LANSING

BOLD partnership emboldens Lansing students

The future of Lansing lies in the success of its young people, and the future of its young people is dependent on a solid foundation of financial education. Through the BOLD partnership, the City – and its partners – took on the important task of integrating financial education resources and opportunities. As part of the What Works Cities (WWC) Economic Mobility Initiative, this program was supported and evaluated by the Behavioral Insights Team (BIT). This memo encompasses our high level findings along with some recommended next steps.

⚠ Issue Motivation

In 2016, Lansing's high schools had a disappointingly low

. Lansing students who did graduate were

due to lack of access and funding. Over the past five years, the Lansing community has begun to develop programs to support families in the school district, ranging from children's savings accounts to full tuition scholarships. While individual programs had great success in supporting Lansing families, residents were not able to easily and consistently benefit from the full continuum of support that was available to them. Each program had different requirements and conducted separate outreach to local families. In addition, the partners did not have shared metrics or goals to help unify their efforts. This project, therefore, aimed to help create a simple, cohesive experience that supports Lansing families in planning and preparing for postsecondary education. Within this BIT-led pilot, we focused on creating a cohesive service offering for high school seniors and first year college students to build financial skills as they entered post-secondary studies.

"[BOLD Lansing] a generational solution to a generational problem. It's my vision that through BOLD Lansing, our city will become a model for others across the country and at the very foundation of that success are our children."

— Andy Schor, Mayor of Lansing

Our Approach

The intervention focused on helping to set up the BOLD partnership for success within the Lansing community. The intervention had three key activities:

- 1 A pilot of integration of service offerings between partners led by BIT,
- 2 Raising awareness of the BOLD Lansing partnership in the community, and
- 3 Development of a governance and sustainability plan.

BIT helped to develop a pilot offering of financial empowerment services to current first-year **Lansing Promise Scholars** and evaluation of their experience at the Financial Empowerment Center (FEC). Between August 2020 and March 2021, Lansing Promise and the FEC conducted personalized text message and email outreach to the scholars to encourage them to attend sessions at the FEC. Once scholars attended sessions at the FEC, they were eligible for up to \$125 in Amazon Gift cards as incentives to complete goals related to their financial wellbeing (including reaching a savings goal, creating a budget, conducting a credit check or other individualized goals set up by FEC counselors).

Evaluation Methodology

BIT used a mixed methods approach – incorporating both quantitative and qualitative techniques – to assess the pilot’s effect on financial knowledge, adoption of positive financial behaviors, and financial capability. BIT conducted a pre-post survey to measure student progress, conducted interviews with partners, and collected financial wellbeing indicators. The pilot ran from August 2020 through April 2021.

Our pilot aimed to answer the following research questions:

- * Do these scholars need financial empowerment services?
- * What would the FEC experience be like for scholars?
- * What are the best ways to promote this service and BOLD Lansing to these scholars?

Our pilot measured key outcomes for these research questions including: number of scholars who attended the FEC, number of sessions conducted, financial goals achieved by scholars, and survey feedback from scholars and BOLD Lansing partners.

COVID-19 Modifications

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, we made several changes to the initial plan for the pilot:

- * Paused project development in March 2020 and relaunched in July 2020.
- * The scholars we had planned to serve as high school seniors, were then first-year Lansing Promise Scholars by the time the pilot began.
- * No in-person outreach was conducted due to social distancing requirements.
- * All FEC appointments were conducted remotely to comply with public health guidance.
- * BIT worked more closely with Lansing Promise instead of in-person outreach with Lansing School District and Capital Area College Access Network (CAPCAN).
- * Timelines were no longer aligned to semester-based events such as “fall break.”

Results

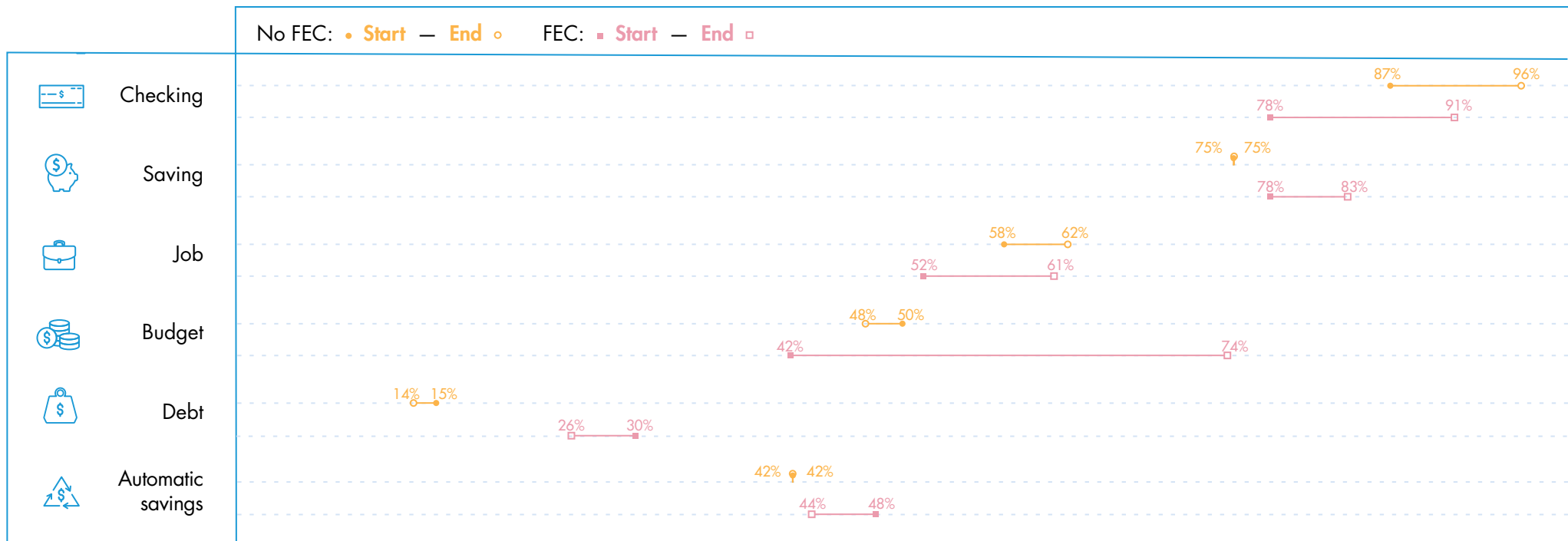
Using a variety of outreach techniques, our baseline survey reached more than 200 Lansing Promise Scholars to better understand their current financial knowledge and behaviors. We found that students already had the financial basics covered (such as a savings and checking account), but were interested in learning more about advanced topics such as how to create a budget and financial aid for higher education.

Our main program goal was to help encourage scholars to attend individual sessions at the FEC. During the pilot, 36 scholars visited the FEC. These scholars accounted for more than 80 sessions. While we had an initial goal of 50 students attending FEC sessions, BOLD Lansing partners were quite encouraged by the turnout – especially in light of the hardships students faced with the COVID-19 pandemic.

While at the FEC, scholars made progress on their own financial goals (see Figure 1).

- Most set and accomplished a personal savings goal, and they collectively saved more than \$3,800 in the pilot period
- More than \$2,800 in incentives were awarded for these goals
- About a quarter of attendees were able to check and review their credit report
- Scholars who surpassed their goals worked with the FEC to develop new goals such as paying off debt, applying for jobs, or negotiating a raise at work

Figure 1. Scholar Progress on Financial Goals, by FEC Attendance



Lessons Learned & Key Insights

Scaling Opportunities & Recommendations

Pilot Service Offering

- * **FEC sessions appealed to both ends of the financial spectrum.** Attendees were either financially secure but eager to learn, or struggling and in need of significant support. Scholars who fell into these different categories required different types of support and resources. This pilot did not reach scholars who were in the “middle” of this spectrum.
- * **Scholars made key progress at the FEC.** Most set and accomplished a personal savings goal, created a budget and worked on further financial goals (e.g., paying off debt, negotiating a pay raise).
- * **Financial aid is needed beyond high school.** Recent high school graduates and first-year undergraduates requested additional support in navigating financial aid for higher education.

- * **Develop intake process or new offerings to help segment students based on their needs and interest levels.** There is an opportunity to segment and then tailor services to scholars based on their needs and interests to ensure students are getting the right level of support. Where resources or staff are limited, we recommend focusing on the students who are most in need first.
- * **Explore opportunities to help reach students in “the middle.”** Explore strategies to reach vulnerable students who might not choose to opt in to financial support services. For example, embedding financial empowerment into school curriculum.
- * **Identify and connect students to supports for financial aid beyond high school.** Promote financial aid support services from existing partners for high school graduates and undergraduate to make sure that scholars are aware of services and can access them.

Outreach to Scholars

- * **Email and text messages can be a good form of outreach for this population, while social media outreach may need more targeting.** We were able to reach about half of the target population through text and email, and most scholars opted to provide phone numbers to receive follow-up information. However, the initial outreach on Facebook was engaged with by users from outside Lansing.
- * **Trusted messengers and organizations are key to reach target audience.** Initial outreach from Lansing Promise helped to not only reach the target audience but also reassure scholars about the legitimacy of this opportunity.
- * **Incentives can be effective with this population.** Small incentives appeared to boost survey participation and FEC attendance.

- * **Continue virtual outreach strategies, Invest efforts in more intensive strategies including in person outreach.** Partners should continue to text and email students, but should look for in-person opportunities to reach students.
- * **Utilize community leaders to boost recognition of new programs.** Recruit community members that students are familiar with to conduct outreach about new program offerings. This will help students recognize the program’s legitimacy and make the opportunities more attractive.
- * **Leverage incentives to support participation levels.** Identify funding opportunities or partnerships to allow for small incentives to encourage participation in new programs, where possible.

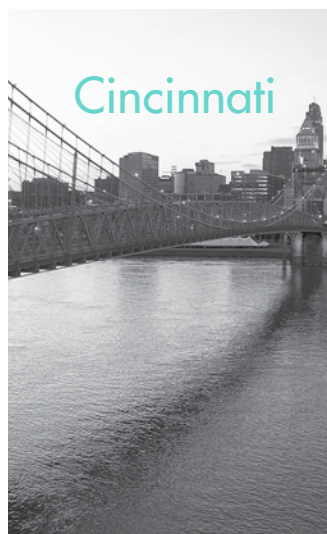
About this Initiative

The [What Works Cities Economic Mobility Initiative](#) is a program that aims to help nine participating cities identify, pilot, and measure the success of local strategies designed to accelerate economic mobility for their residents. Through the expertise of the What Works Cities' network of [local government leaders](#) and the support of Bloomberg Philanthropies, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and Ballmer Group, this initiative puts data and evidence at the center of local government decision-making. The Initiative launched in April 2019, with an 18-month timeline, but was extended to 30 months as a result of COVID-19. In each city, a project was selected in collaboration with the city leaders that met the following five criteria: evidence base, mayoral priority, scalability, feasibility, and stewarding taxpayer resources.

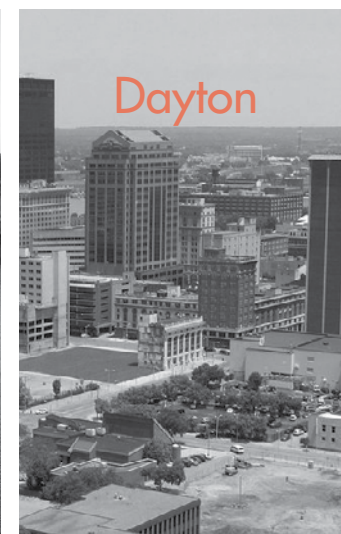
Launched in 2015, [What Works Cities](#) helps local governments use data and evidence to tackle their most pressing challenges and improve residents' lives. Learn more at [www.whatworkscities.org](#).

City Partners

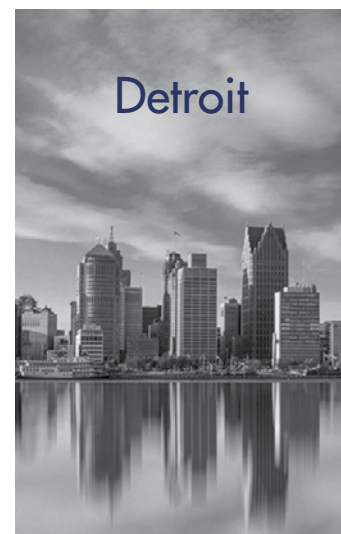
This pilot was supported by the BOLD Lansing partnership with significant support from the City of Lansing, the Financial Empowerment Center (FEC), and Lansing Promise staff.



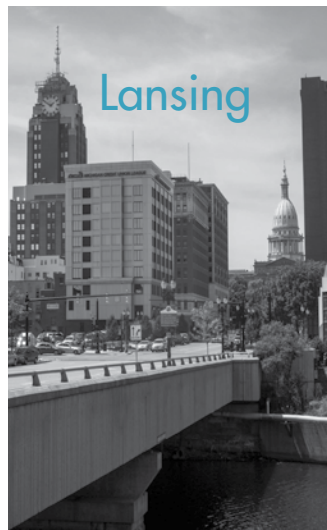
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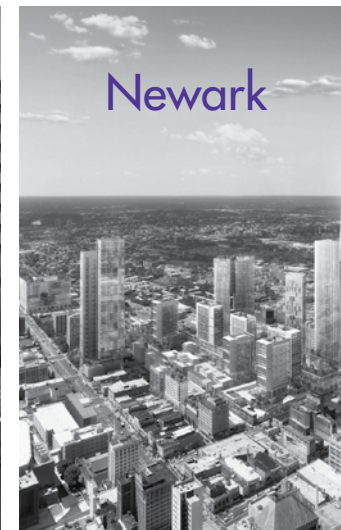
Dayton



Detroit



Lansing



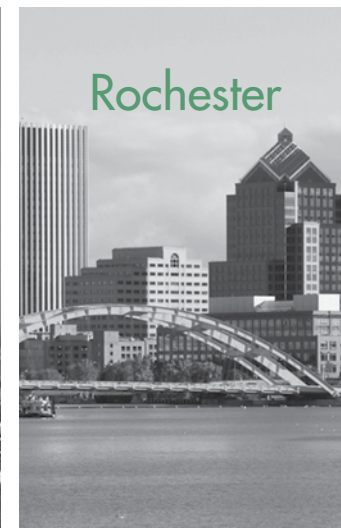
Newark



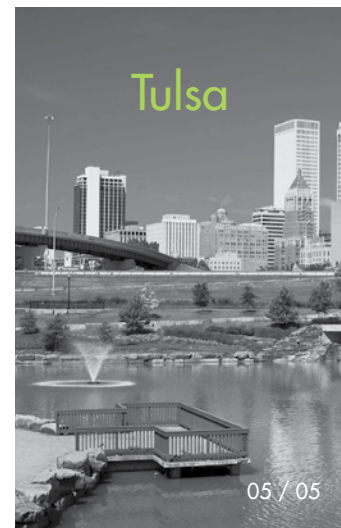
New Orleans



Racine



Rochester



Tulsa