



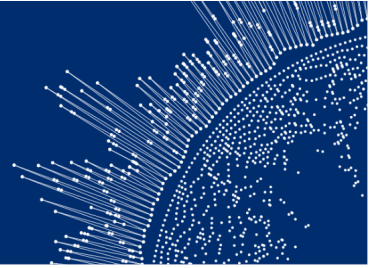
Action Plan for Allentown

Understanding & Addressing Evictions in Allentown

Implementing, Communicating, Integrating, and
Scaling Allentown’s Resident Impact Data Project

February 28, 2025

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01 Executive Summary

Purpose

This report seeks to summarize the resident impact data project (RIDP) work done by the City of Allentown in partnership with coaches and analysts from the Bloomberg Center for Government Excellence as part of the Bloomberg Philanthropies City Data Alliance from June 2024 - February 2025.

Key findings

Through the RIDP, Allentown deepened and broadened its knowledge about the impact of eviction on its community. The city actively sought data and insights from subject matter experts from cross-sector partners already working in eviction mitigation and prevention. Through data cleaning, analysis, mapping, and discussion, the city validated that serial evictors who regularly file evictions against their tenants—such as Park Run Management Co. who filed almost 7% of all eviction filings in the county—exist in the city; that 77% of all eviction cases are won by the landlords; and that eviction cases are mostly occurring in the 18102 zip code in Allentown. The city began to delve into data collection gaps in eviction data and related city datasets for code enforcement.

Path forward

The most powerful takeaway for Allentown from the RIDP was the power of cross-sector subject matter expertise and data. To advance the city's work, it is crucial to establish a regular cadence of collaboration with partners to develop a coordinated action plan for preventing and mitigating eviction, allowing each partner to contribute their unique skills and resources for meaningful impact. In tandem with their external partners, Allentown is joining a cohort of cities focused on

eviction prevention and mitigation, which plans to meet and collaborate over a series of months.



02 Introduction

What are resident impact data projects?

The resident impact data project (RIDP) is an intensive demonstration project to test and improve city data infrastructure and problem solving oriented towards resident impact. This project demonstrates the importance of integrating data into the fabric of city governance and policy-making. As part of the Bloomberg Philanthropies City Data Alliance, the RIDP is used as a way for cities to assess needs and opportunities for a citywide data strategy.

With support from program coaches and data analysts, cities complete an analytical project that addresses long-standing challenges and delivers solutions with positive and direct impact on residents' lives. This hands-on experience provides valuable insights and practical feedback, helping to test, refine, enhance, and generalize the development of the citywide data strategy. By identifying a specific challenge, each city can demonstrate the feasibility and benefits of new and improved data practices, provide a realistic roadmap for future efforts, and a test bench to create a more robust strategy. Moreover, the successful execution of these projects illustrates the significant value of data-driven decision-making. By showcasing how data can be leveraged to address and resolve critical urban issues, the program underscores the transformative power of data in improving quality of life for all residents.

Background

Allentown came to the RIDP project with the desire to work on a high priority issue for residents. From regional and local reports, the city understood that Lehigh Valley faces an eviction crisis, with 18 renters facing eviction every day. Notably, the county has the third highest rate within the state, and some of the highest zip codes for eviction in the state are within Allentown.

Transience from evictions negatively impacts many community members and stakeholders. For example, the school district reports a high level of truancy in some of their schools due to transience. Evictions can also lead to less optimal housing situations such as overcrowding, low quality housing, or becoming unhoused.

To direct the right policy or programmatic interventions to address this issue, Allentown wanted to learn what is correlated with or leads to evictions.

Team

- Laura Cole, Manager of Civic Innovation, City of Allentown
- Gerry Anthony, Director of IT, City of Allentown
- Yvonne Kingon, Manager of Public Health Engagement, City of Allentown
- Talib Shively, Help Desk Analyst, City of Allentown
- Vicky Kistler, Director of Community and Economic Development, City of Allentown
- Kumari Ghafoor-Davis, People and Culture Specialist, City of Allentown
- Madison Schettig, Public Safety Analyst, City of Allentown
- Heidi Westerman, Director of Buildings, Standards, and Safety, City of Allentown
- Lori Molloy, Executive Director, North Penn Legal Services
- Samantha Shaak, Executive Director, Leonard Parker Pool Institute of Health
- Judge Mark McCants, Magistrate, Lehigh County

Objectives of the project

- Review existing housing data and reports to understand what is known and what is unknown.
- Create or deepen connections with organizations working on the issue of eviction to provide subject matter expertise to the project.
- Obtain and analyze eviction data to better understand data quality, geographic distribution, and whether some landlords are serial evictors.

**Bloomberg Philanthropies
City Data Alliance**



03 Analysis and Findings

Problem statement

Lehigh Valley faces an eviction crisis, with 18 renters facing eviction every day. The county has the third highest rate within the state. Some of the highest zip codes for eviction in the state are within Allentown.

To direct the right policy or programmatic interventions to address this issue, Allentown wanted to learn more about what is correlated with or leads to evictions. Nonprofits in the city work to prevent evictions and address the impacts of this issue, and the city seeks to learn from and incorporate this expertise into decisions. One of the city's partner organizations is **North Penn Legal Services**, which offers free legal assistance, information, and self-help resources for family law, housing, public benefits, and other civil legal issues in Northeast Pennsylvania. Another, the **Leonard Parker Pool Institute for Health**, partners with the city to address eviction as a public health challenge, bringing expertise in holistic neighborhood development and capacity building to support housing stability and community well-being.

Data analysis

Analysis was conducted of an eviction dataset for Lehigh County, containing over 38,000 observations related to eviction filings between July 2022 and June 2023, and the voting precinct map layer from Lehigh County's ArcGIS repository. The data was cleaned and deduplicated to focus on individual cases. Variables containing personally identifiable information (PII) were removed to protect privacy. The eviction dataset included case details such as defendant and plaintiff information, financial judgments, and case dispositions.

The analysis focused on distilling insights related to geography so the data could be mapped. Since address-level information for eviction locations was unavailable, the magistrate judge was used as a proxy that aligns with magisterial districts.

Another key analysis question was identifying whether “serial evictors” existed among landlords. Due to spelling and format differences, this analysis required significant data cleaning and statistical and AI tools to identify likely matches among landlord business names.

Summary of findings

- **Eviction prevalence:** During this period, 7,136 unique case defendants¹ were involved in 5,328 eviction cases in Allentown. Nearly half (48%) of evictions were concentrated in zip code 18102.
- **Case outcomes:** 77% of cases resulted in rulings favoring landlords, while only 0.77% favored tenants.
- **Financial impact:** The average rent for all the eviction filings was \$1,216.58, with a median of \$1,180. The average claim amount by landlords was \$2,299.51, with some claims exceeding \$11,000. 75% of all eviction filings were for rental properties with rents less than \$1,400.
- **Eviction filers:** There were 1,343 unique plaintiffs (landlords) identified. The most frequently occurring landlord was Park Run Management, with 359 filings (6.7% of all eviction filings).
- **Judicial oversight:** Six judges handled over 93% of eviction filings, with Judge David M. Howells Jr. presiding over 21.4% of cases.

Limitations and challenges

The eviction dataset is limited by the data collected through the court process, and several fields that could be valuable in the analysis are not present, including the address of the eviction. Geographic values for the defendants (renters) and plaintiffs (landlords) include city, state, and zip code. The decision was made to focus on the zip code of the defendant to identify evictions occurring in Allentown, but in some cases, if the defendant has moved outside of the city (there were out-of-state cities and zip codes in the dataset), they may have been excluded from the analysis .

There is no unique identifier for defendants or plaintiffs, so the analysis relied on names to determine unique values. Overall, there was variability in spelling and formatting, which needed to be addressed through extensive cleaning.

Overall, the analysis of “serial evictors” concentrated on frequency rather than process or intent. Factors linked to the frequency of eviction cases—for example, the number of units owned or managed by a landlord—may not be reflected in this analysis.

The analysis focused on the 2022-2023 period and does not show trends for more recent evictions; however, a similar analysis could be pursued with more current data.

¹ We considered each defendant and case as a “unique case defendant”. It could be the case that the same name appears in multiple cases, however each appearance is considered a unique defendant.

Opportunities for further analysis and evaluation

The analysis of "serial evictors" counted the number of filings per unique plaintiff but did not connect these plaintiffs with geographic information to link serial evictions to specific properties. It may be possible to overlay other city datasets with this analysis to enhance this geographic information. Combining it with rental registration data could also reveal the relationship between evictions and code enforcement violations. Further data cleaning and research could be conducted to gather the addresses of the properties with the most evictions in the city.

As discussed previously, the analysis of serial evictors also does not distinguish landlords who use eviction in bad faith as a singular tool to create a churn of tenants and benefit their business. Analysis of other factors in the eviction dataset may help differentiate between factors preceding eviction. Tracking these frequent eviction filers and analyzing their rental practices could inform potential regulatory measures.

There may be opportunities to undertake further analysis into the filing outcomes and the data around rent levels and rent owed, with assistance from external partners with subject matter expertise in the eviction process and the meaning behind this data.



04 Anticipated Impact

Overall, the goal of Allentown's RIDP is to prevent and/or mitigate the impact of evictions for residents. The city wants to support an accessible, affordable, and quality rental housing environment for residents in which residents understand their rights and responsibilities and know where to find information and resources for support when encountering housing challenges.

05 Allentown Action Plan

The goal of the RIDP is to inform action that will have a meaningful impact on residents. Bloomberg Philanthropies City Data Alliance staff will guide the city team in assessing progress of this action plan at regular impact check-ins following program completion.

Goals

- Improve access to relevant city data like code enforcement violations for key stakeholders who are involved in the evictions process.
- Improve communication with residents about their rights and responsibilities as renters and landlords.
- Collaborate with partners to identify key problems or gaps in the eviction process and create action plan to address gaps in information sharing.
- Gather information from residents and partners about resources, policies, and/or programs that the city can consider in order to improve the rental environment in Allentown.

Next Steps

Action Items

The city will:

- Join the Impact Tulsa 2025 Student Eviction Prevention Community of Practice and collaborate with key partners, including The Leonard Parker Pool Institute for Health, North Penn Legal Services, and Community Services for Children, to develop coordinated strategies for eviction prevention and mitigation.
- Improve access to code enforcement data for partners.
- Improve the usefulness of code enforcement data through modifications to data collection and reporting in order to support a quality rental environment in Allentown.

Responsible Parties

Laura Cole, Manager of Civic Innovation at the City of Allentown, will serve as project manager for the city's ongoing work. She will rely on support from other city staff as subject matter experts and will coordinate with department and executive leadership to identify a plan of action for the city.

Timelines

February 2025: Begin regular meeting cadence with partners

Fall 2025: Identify and implement ways to improve code enforcement data access and quality

Winter 2025: Create action plan for the city to pursue with regard to eviction mitigation and prevention

Spring 2026: Implement action plan

Resources Needed

Resources needed to support this effort will be determined as the action plan is developed.



06 Communication Strategy

Internal Communications

- Allentown's RIDP is an opportunity to demonstrate to staff how data can be used to inform operations and strategy to achieve the city's goals. It is also an opportunity to create a workable cross-sector model of collaboration that could be utilized in the future for other issues and goals.
- The city's project manager will establish an internal committee of subject matter experts who are actively engaged in this project.
- For communication to the broader range of staff, the city will leverage the expertise of their data governance committee and nascent community of practice to identify the best channels and storytelling methods.

External Communications

- Communications to residents will come in multiple forms. Specific communications related to the project about rental housing rights and responsibilities may be developed and shared with residents through established channels, both digitally and in physical form.
- General communications to residents about the outcomes from this project will follow the implementation of action plans steps and use established channels.



07 Recommendations

To successfully implement this project, Allentown will require the following resources:

- Dedicated time from their project manager and other members of the team.
- Support from IT and external partners as needed for data analysis.
- Engagement and support from executive leadership to prioritize and resource the action plan.

08 Citywide Data Strategy Integration

- **Quality:** The RIDP helped to underscore and illustrate issues with data quality on code enforcement data, as well give examples of how to address these issues through cleaning and data collection changes.
- **Governance:** Data ownership was a consideration for the RIDP since the primary dataset is not owned by the city and needed to be obtained from partners. Data ownership has also been an issue in discussion with external partners, who do not have regular access to city code enforcement data. The project has provided an excellent case study in challenges and opportunities with data access and transparency.
- **Capacity:** The city's lack of dedicated capacity for data efforts has been an ongoing point of focus and concern with regard to sustainable implementation of the CWDS. The city plans to begin to build capacity and buy-in through implementation of their Data Governance Committee. It will be important to leverage this committee's expertise and feedback as the RIDP action plan is further developed.

- **Use:** The RIDP provided a platform for city staff to engage with a new topic and collaboratively think about data questions that they would like to prioritize. As the team began to gather and review data, it was an opportunity to have conversations about how available data did or did not answer the city's key analysis questions. The team had several far-reaching and thoughtful conversations about data insights and their implications, both with city staff and external partners, which encapsulated the goal and focus of Use as a pillar.
- **Transparency:** As data access limitations demonstrated (see Governance), while transparency is valued by partners, there are many opportunities to improve upon it as the RIDP evolves in its implementation.



09 Acknowledgements

10 Appendices

Link to RIDP Technical Report

[Allentown and Lehigh County Evictions by Magisterial District Map](#)

[Voting Precincts in Lehigh County](#)

[RIDP Exploratory Analysis Slides \(12/02/2024\)](#)

[Allentown RIDP - Questions](#)

Link to Citywide Data Strategy

Links to any additional analyses, products, decks, etc from this project