

Reforming NYC Homelessness Strategy

Why did Bloomberg fail to effect change in homelessness strategy in the City that Never Sleeps?

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Introduction

Despite many efforts over the last 30 years, homelessness has been increasing in New York City (NYC). In 2004 Mayor Bloomberg publically committed to reducing homeless by 66% within five-years (2009) and introduced an ambitious Action Plan to tackle homelessness. The strategy shifted away from the focus on the voucher system for federal housing previously effective in the Koch, Dinkins, and Giuliani administration and emphasized a multi-sector approach, which called upon the “personal responsibility” of affected populations and private, public, and third sector actors to help quickly shift individuals and families into long-term subsidized housing. While the plan promised many elements of a successful reform, homelessness rates saw only a short-term reduction before continuing to rise. By 2012, funding for many initiatives had been cut and NYC continues to see record levels of homelessness. This unexpected course begs the question: Where did Mayor Bloomberg fail at managing the change process to create a successful reform?

This study aims to answer this question by analyzing Bloomberg’s shift in homeless strategy throughout 2004-2013. The analysis tracks the reform through the stages of the policy cycle. As Bloomberg’s new reform was a non-linear process, it can best be analyzed using the Bertelsmann Stiftung’s model for strategic policy reform, which focuses on *Competence*, *Communication*, and *Capability to Implement*. The analysis is based upon observable implications from a broad range of secondary sources, such as varied media coverage and website information, opinion pieces and information released from advocacy groups, and a variety of policy briefs and reports issued by key stakeholders. Discrepancies in information on the reform’s legacy across stakeholder communications, as well as between the original Action Plan and the progress report of 2008, especially reflect the flaws in the change process. This analysis is a jumping off point to assess key lessons learned and draw policy implications for future reform strategy on NYC homelessness.