



ARTICLE

A Hands-on Approach to Community Development

A team of FTI Consulting professionals recently partnered with Big Brothers Big Sisters of New York City to enhance the organization's reporting capabilities and measurement of youth development.

Prioritizing community development following the difficult experiences of 2020

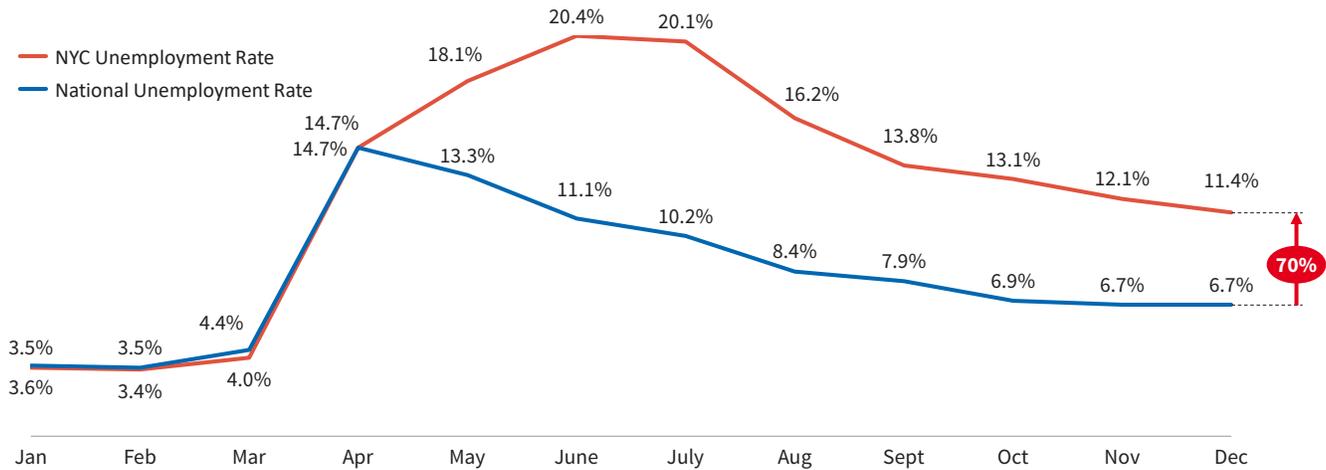
The past year has challenged businesses, communities, institutions and society itself in many unexpected ways. COVID-related hospitalizations soared, unemployment skyrocketed, businesses shuttered and schools suspended in-class learning across the nation. Alongside the pandemic and its economic fallout, a social justice movement shook the country and focused our attention on racial and economic inequities pervasive in our society — inequities that in many ways were exposed and exacerbated by the coronavirus. Yet if you want to find a silver lining amid the many dismal events of 2020, the year left many individuals and organizations asking what more they can do to have a positive societal impact and then take constructive action towards that goal.



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At FTI Consulting, we identified an opportunity to drive such change by offering pro bono consulting services to non-profit organizations. In many ways, the consequences of the coronavirus, and the inequities we are confronted with today, are best addressed at the community level. In New York, City for example, the virus revealed the tenuous threads that the heavily service-based economy was reliant upon. In December, unemployment (Exhibit 1) remained nearly double the national average (11.4% vs. 6.7%).

Exhibit 1: New York City vs. National Monthly Unemployment Rate - 2020



Source: New York State Department of Labor, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

The question then becomes, how can companies engage with the cities in which they operate, to directly impact the development of entire communities?

Call to Action: FTI Consulting partners with Big Brothers Big Sisters of New York City

We recently partnered with Big Brothers Big Sisters of New York City (BBBS of NYC), a non-profit dedicated to supporting one-to-one relationships between an adult mentor and a youth. BBBS of NYC is the nation’s first and New York City’s largest youth mentoring organization, and their enduring vision is that all youth reach their full potential.¹

BBBS of NYC tasked our team with two specific goals. First, they asked us to analyze survey data they had been collecting (but had yet to evaluate or act upon) on the youth (referred to as “Littles”) within their program, and to develop a dynamic reporting dashboard from the data. Second, they encouraged us to explore an expansive list of datasets available through New York City’s open database and consider ways to contextualize these metrics with survey results.

Survey data analytics drive value for Big Brothers Big Sisters Youth

We began by categorizing each question into one of four

high-level categories, eventually creating three levels of categorization. Next, we created a scoring system for each of the qualitative answers, so that across each category, the total scores of an individual could be compared against the median scores of a desired peer set. To further refine the peer sets, we added defining characteristics for each individual, including school level, ethnicity, gender and other factors.

With multiple categories, we created a hierarchy for users to explore the performance of an individual child at varying levels of detail. Importantly, users have the flexibility to dynamically compare the performance (Exhibit 2) of an individual to other children who are most likely to share similar experiences.



Exhibit 2: Viewing Survey Results by Level of Detail Required



- 1 **Review High-Level Performance**
 - Select an individual to view their specific survey results
 - Review several contextual factors about the Little that are provided on the page (e.g., school ranking, age, if they have “complicating factors”, etc.)
 - Understand the Little’s score for each high-level category, as is displayed relative to the median score of the peer group



- 2 **View Performance by Category**
 - Select “resiliency” factors and drill into any of the main categories, based upon user preference
 - View Little’s performance in each of the categories, relative to their peers, in a box & whisker plot, to understand their overall ranking
 - Toggle “resiliency” factors, and the various categories, to understand the differences in scores for a Little in each primary category



- 3 **Understand Score Drivers**
 - Review each of the subcategories that comprise the high-level category score
 - Understand how the subcategories (e.g., school connectedness) drives the overall category score (e.g., academics & schooling)
 - Identify the subcategories with under/over performance and drill into the specific questions and answers that are driving the results

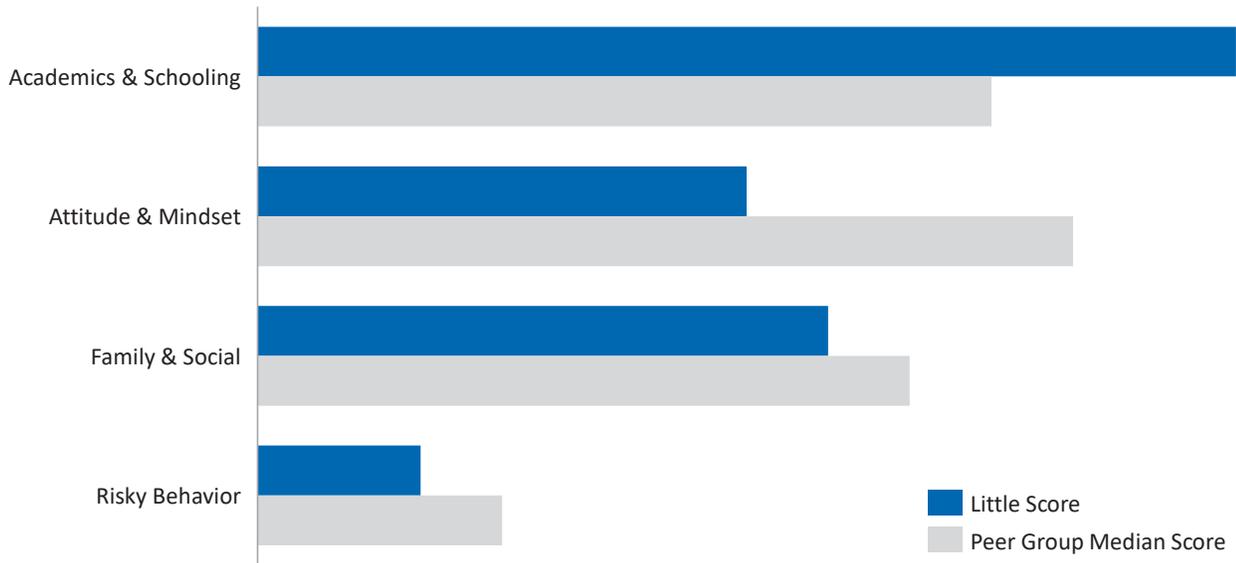
This capability drives results in several meaningful ways. First, for Program Managers, whose role is focused on supporting the social-emotional development of youth in the program, and work with Littles daily, the ability to view survey results of an individual, will aid them in providing each child with targeted opportunities for development. In total, there are over 5,300 youths in the program, and having easily reviewable survey results will help managers handle workloads and monitor a child’s performance.

In one instance, we engaged with a Program Manager to identify a Little whose survey results differed from what was anticipated after review of the dashboarding tool. The child in question had struggled with an important development area in the past, but based

upon recent conversations with the Program Manager, the issue seemed to be improving. However, when reviewing the scores of the Little in categories related to the development area in question, the individual’s performance lagged considerably behind the peer group. The Program Manager responded by introducing a program aimed at addressing the identified issue. In this instance, the value is clear: the reporting dashboard expedited their ability to introduce a supportive intervention.

To further contextualize the dynamic dashboard, we have provided a simplified and purely illustrative example. (Exhibit 3) The starting point is to view a selected Little’s scores against the desired peer set across the high-level categories.

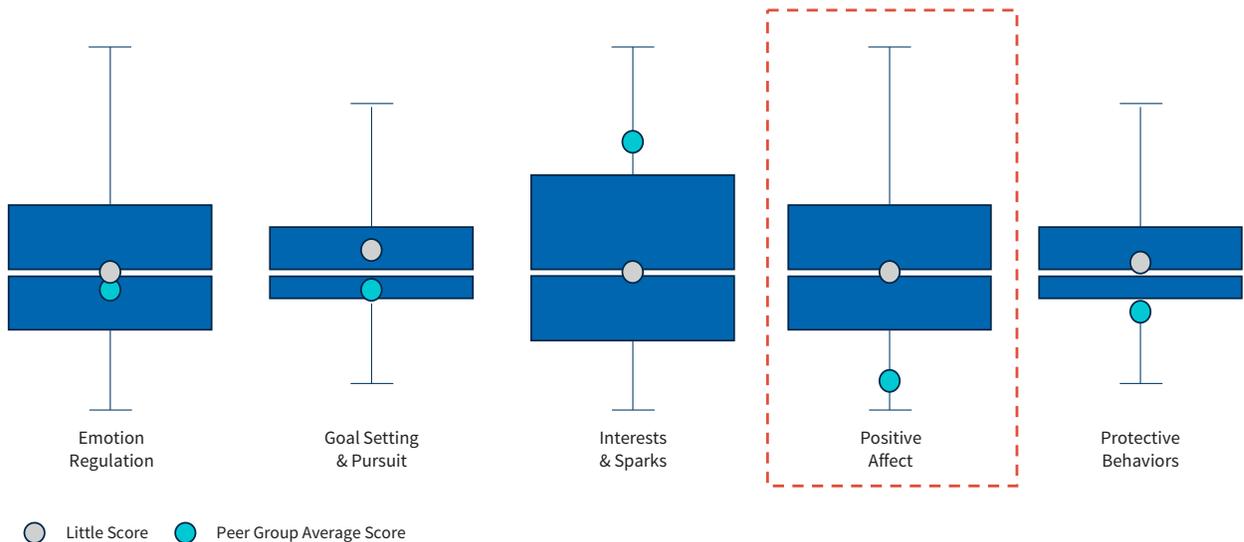
Exhibit 3: Illustrative Example: Little Score Relative to Selected Peer Group



Note: Above visual is illustrative and not representative of any specific member of the Big Brothers Big Sisters program.

In this scenario, the Little is performing above the median in Academics & Schooling and Risky Behavior (a smaller Risky Behavior score is a positive), but below their peer group in Attitude & Mindset and Family & Social. A user can drill into the Attitude & Mindset subcategory (Exhibit 4) to view what is driving those results:

Exhibit 4: Illustrative Example: Attitude & Mindset Subcategory Ranking



Note: Above visual is illustrative and not representative of any specific member of the Big Brothers Big Sisters program.

At the subcategory level, a series of charts illustrates the Little's ranking relative to their peer group. In this example, the Positive Affect subcategory is clearly an area for further investigation. A Program Manager can dig deeper to identify the questions in the category, as well as the Little's response to each question, and then develop an action plan based upon the findings.

For management, the reporting dashboards create a unique opportunity to identify issues for various groups within the child population. Using the same scoring methodology introduced, we captured the median scores for all students identifying as LGBTQ+ and compared their scores against the rest of the peer set. This capability allows the organization to identify how systemically disenfranchised groups may be having difficulty, and implement programs geared towards addressing these systemic inequities.

Importantly, meaningful action will result from these findings. For instance, if the organization identifies that a subgroup of Littles is more likely to engage in risky behaviors (e.g., drinking alcohol, taking drugs, etc.), a special program can be developed to work with these children to address the findings. Over time, the organization's goal will be to increase the scores of their Littles, and they'll be able to emphasize and track the development of Littles in systemically disenfranchised groups.

Finally, by adding publicly available data to the model, the organization can further the understanding of how external community factors may be impacting child development. For example, we demonstrated a relationship between the average Risky Behavior scores of Littles within each community and the percentage of students living in temporary housing in that district. On its own, this finding probably isn't very surprising.

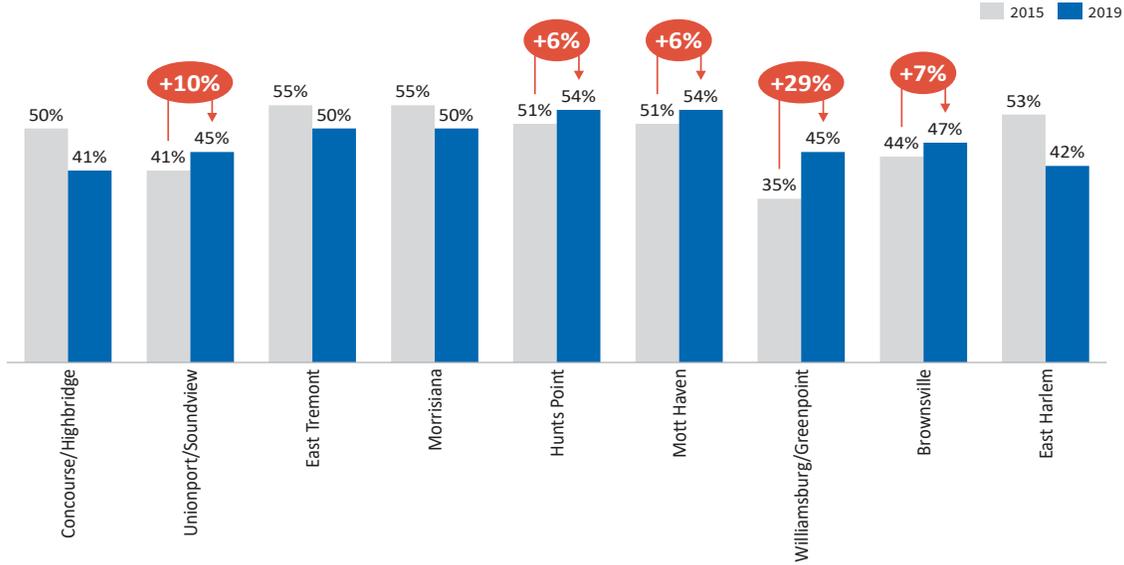
However, the flexibility of the data model will allow for the creation of visuals from any one of the external datasets captured, linking those metrics by district to the average survey scores of Littles within that specific community. From working with parents to engaging with community leaders, the ability to pinpoint trends connecting external factors and their potential impact on the development of Littles will be an important force in developing community programs or targeting a particular group of Littles in need of a special initiative.

Examining developmental progress within New York City

BBBS of NYC's mentoring approach is tailored to the individual child, and the more data points captured for each Little, the greater the opportunity to drive specific change. This is especially important in large and diverse areas like New York City, where community progress is complex and often unpredictable.

One of the fundamental data sets captured was Child Poverty Rates by Community District, which highlights the percentage of children under 18 living in households below the Federal Poverty Level. In 2019, the Federal Poverty Level for a family of five was \$30,170. Last year, 56% of the city's communities reported poverty levels above the national average of roughly 16.7%, or one in six children. Perhaps more surprisingly, 13 districts saw their child poverty rates increase since 2015. The disparity between communities is also stark: 51 percentage points separate both Mott Haven and Hunts Point (54%) and the Upper East Side (3%)—neighborhoods separated by just a few miles. Their experience isn't exactly an outlier either; nine communities across the Bronx, Brooklyn and Manhattan reported child poverty rates above 40%, as shown in Exhibit 5.

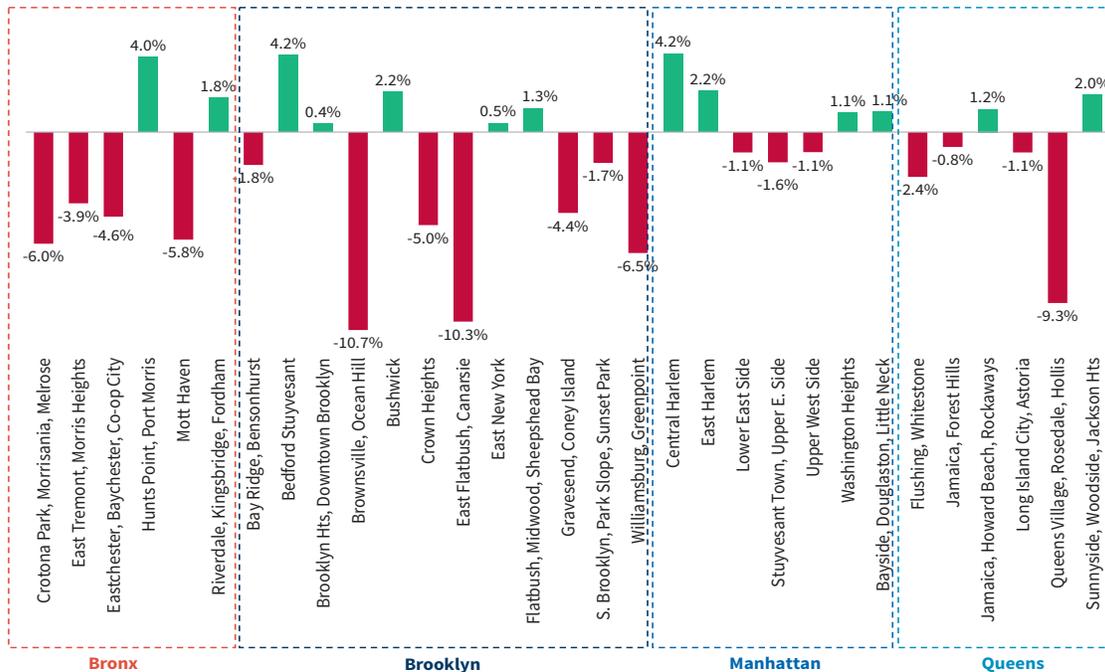
Exhibit 5: Child Poverty Rates by Borough (>40% Poverty Rate Only)



Source: Citizens' Committee for Children of New York Child Poverty

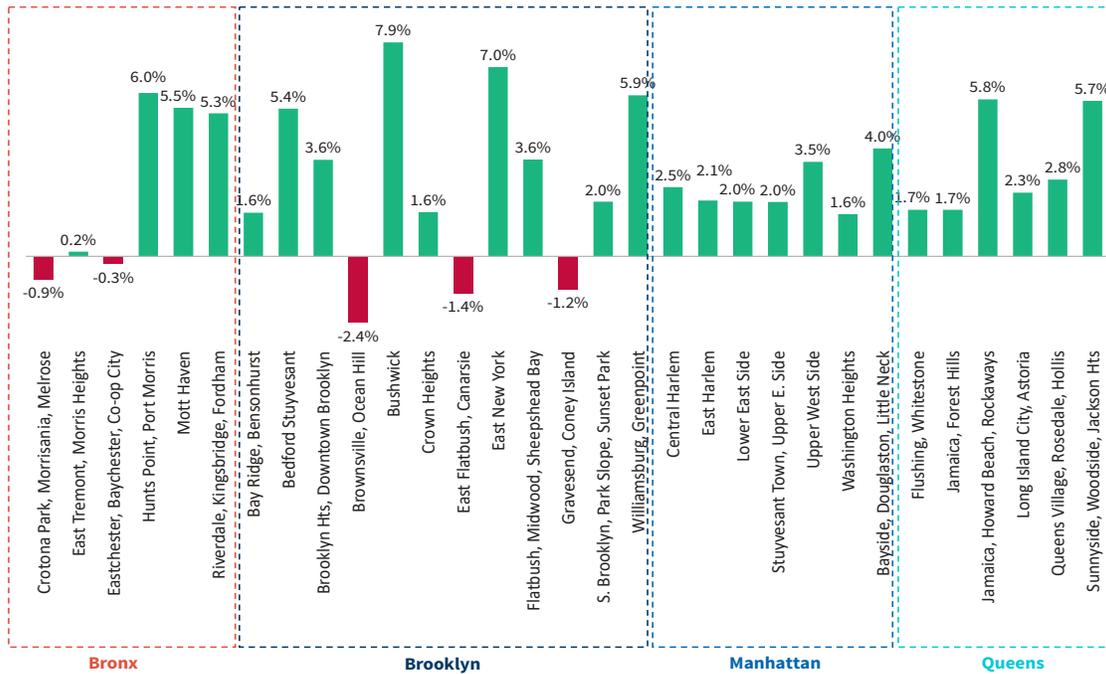
Beyond economic indicators, we identified a variety of academic performance scores by school district. The charts in Exhibits 6 and 7 show the change of math and ELA proficiency between 2015 and 2019. Across the 31 school districts available, we can see clear disparities in performance trends. Math scores were notable, with 58% of districts scoring worse in 2019 than they did five years earlier. In general, academic progress in New York City is inconsistent across districts, leaving some students at an advantage over others. For BBBS of NYC, intervention on behalf of students in need of academic support, especially for those in districts with declining academic performance, is an important capability, which will be improved from reviewing detailed survey results.

Exhibit 6: Change in Math Proficiency Scores (2015 - 2019)



Source: Citizens' Committee for Children of New York Math & ELA Proficiency

Exhibit 7: Change in ELA Proficiency Scores (2015 – 2019)



Source: Citizens’ Committee for Children of New York Math & ELA Proficiency

Our purpose for introducing these metrics is to reinforce a fundamental point that progress is not constant or linear. Communities grow, stagnate and even regress, at different times and at different rates from one another. For BBBS of NYC, engaging with students in each community, especially those where external factors are worsening, and pinpointing specific areas of development for each Little is critical. These metrics further highlight the importance of youth development and help emphasize the role mentoring plays in social-emotional development and academic progress.

Notably, each of the metrics we introduced captured 2019 performance. Child poverty, academic performance and dropout rates are all at risk in a year that has been beset by unemployment and remote schooling. Our collective focus has been primarily on health concerns related to the coronavirus, but the full impact of the virus on communities is yet unknown, and its consequences may be even more profound.

The data difference and positive impact on Big Brothers Big Sisters

Through FTI Consulting’s partnership with BBBS of NYC, we were able to add a data focused element to the way the organization evaluates the development of individual Littles and groups of children. The organization now has an additional method to identify potential issues, and implement specific solutions to address the potential problem, before it becomes even more difficult to manage. Additionally, BBBS of NYC is now better prepared to demonstrate the efficacy of their programs, which will be beneficial when engaging with business partners and community leaders. Unfortunately, the path to success has likely been made more daunting by the COVID-related setbacks of the past year. However, improvement will continue to come through the important work of organizations like BBBS of NYC, and as milestones are achieved, we will all be better for it.



Footnotes:

1. Big Brothers Big Sisters of New York City, bigsync.org
2. U.S. Department of Health & Human Services

RYAN MCCORMICK

Director
+1 212.651.7158
ryan.mccormick@fticonsulting.com

NATHAN LOMBARDI

Senior Consultant
+1 617.459.6887
nathan.lombardi@fticonsulting.com



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