**Local Innovations in Public Service Delivery**

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**Introduction**

Under fiscal stress and state-mandated responsibilities, local governments are developing creative ways to ensure adequate service provision. Some of these responses include administrative support for municipal sharing, coproduction with citizens, and user fees. The case studies in these briefs will profile successful approaches that promote both administrative efficiency and citizen engagement under different municipal contexts:

- The success of intermunicipal sharing hinges on the existence of a strong administrative structure to guide service delivery across municipal borders.
- The rise of technology provides new opportunities for service-related coproduction between governments and citizens.
- If structured correctly, innovative user fees can better align user preference with user payment to ensure equity and affordability.

**Sharing Services & an Administrative Backbone**

Under New York State’s Tax Cap and Tax Freeze, local governments are pressured to share more services. However, there remains a need for administrative support from the state level to aid municipalities in creating successful sharing arrangements.

Many municipalities both within and beyond New York State have begun to develop administrative structures of their own to design and implement successful contracts across municipalities. Some examples include: the Tompkins County Council of Governments, the Municipal Service Sharing & Consolidation Program in Allegheny, PA, and Shared Service Centers in the United Kingdom.

**Engaging Citizens Through Co-Production**

Service delivery schemes that involve citizens offer the possibility of reducing costs, increasing user satisfaction and promoting a sense of ownership. Co-production refers to the involvement of “individual citizens and groups in public service delivery” (Verschuere et al, 2012). Nextdoor.com, a social network grounded in place, provides a popular example of cyber connectivity between governments and citizens. This system creates opportunities for community-building, increased proximity of citizens and government, and enhanced information sharing at the neighborhood level.

**Benefits of Well-Designed User Fees**

User fees present a viable alternative revenue source to fund and maintain service delivery for citizens. In 2013, approximately one-third of all local governments in New York State said they raised user fees in response to fiscal stress (Homsy et al, 2013). Some examples of innovative user fees include: sidewalk maintenance through districting and waste reduction through pay-per-use trash tags. These approaches have the potential to promote equity and create environmental benefits, but they need to be well designed to avoid regressive tendencies.

**Conclusion**

While New York State fiscal policy has devolved responsibility to the local level, innovations in service delivery can help to bridge the gap between budget constraints and the demand for services. By focusing on successful case studies, these briefs intend to shrink the learning curve for local governments looking to adapt creatively.

**References**
