



## **Students explore emerging technologies at the 2018 DHS Local Government Case Competition**

From November 7 through 10, more than 60 students from four local universities participated in the 2018 DHS Local Government Case Competition. The event, made possible by the generous support of the Human Services Integration Fund, invites graduate students to apply their knowledge to come up with innovative approaches to tackle current human services issues.

This year, the 15 interdisciplinary teams focused on the topic of emerging technologies and how they may be used to better serve Allegheny County residents. After two days of collaboration and brainstorming, students presented their recommendations on Saturday morning before a panel of judges that included past Local Government Case Competition winners as well as representatives from DHS, local foundations and other stakeholder groups. The top four teams received prizes of \$3500, \$2500, \$1700 and \$800.

Each team came up with a variety of innovative solutions, including a chatbot to help those recently released from jail find available resources, using machine learning to match job seekers with employment opportunities, and an app and online portal to connect the community to services. The winning idea came from Team West End, comprised of LaChrista Douglas and Rachel Simms (CMU, Heinz School for Public Policy and Management), Josh LeFevre (CMU Design School), Michaela Morrell (University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work). Their suggestion was to build shape-memory polymer furniture and homes to house families and individuals who are homeless or in need of transitional housing accommodations.

"Since this year's topic was much broader than usual, I was very impressed with how many teams perceptively zeroed in on real challenges and applied innovative thinking and cutting-edge technologies to address them," said Alison Wolfson, program specialist in the Office of Analytics, Technology and Planning (ATP) and coordinator of this year's event. "We are excited to explore the creative concepts that were discussed during Case Competition and hope that we can implement some of these ideas to improve outcomes for Allegheny County residents."