

## **Local Government Case Competition offers innovative ideas to give “money to the people”**

For the 11th consecutive year, graduate students from several of Allegheny County’s universities gathered for the DHS Local Government Case Competition. The goal of the event, generously funded by the Human Services Integration Fund, is to apply the creativity and knowledge of students toward solving challenging public-sector problems while also increasing students’ knowledge of local government opportunities.

On Wednesday, November 8, the event’s 76 participants were grouped into 19 interdisciplinary teams to explore the topic *Rethinking Human Services Delivery: Money to the People*. The case queried whether people may know best what they need for themselves and asked students to envision a future where DHS would distribute funds directly to Allegheny County residents in need, describing the pros and cons of this strategy, and detailing how success would be measured.

The students spent the following two days formulating creative, yet realistic recommendations, and presented their ideas and findings to five panels of judges on November 11. The top team from each judging panel moved on to the afternoon’s final presentations.

The five finalists offered a variety of recommendations that included placing smartphones and money in the hands of people reentering the community after time in the Allegheny County Jail; a one-year direct cash assistance program to promote maternal and child health; and cash transfers to improve health outcomes for elderly, low-income adults. At the end of the event, the Greenfield team was selected as the first-place winner – and winner of a \$3,500 group prize – with their pilot program that offered a cohort-based conditional cash transfer program to assist expectant mothers living in poverty. The West End, Veterans, and McKees Rocks teams rounded out the top four, securing team prizes of \$2,500; \$1,700; and \$800, respectively. A fifth-place prize of \$200 in gift cards was awarded to the Westinghouse team.

“This event is a three-way win: The students are exposed, in a much richer way, to the opportunities for challenging, creative and relevant work within local government; we always identify several talented students for internships and potential employment; and we typically hear some solid ideas that can help us strengthen our current programs or develop new ones,” said Alison Wolfson, program specialist in the Office of Data Analysis, Research and Evaluation (DARE) and coordinator of this year’s event. “We look forward to exploring ways we may implement some of the students’ ideas to continue improving human services in Allegheny County.”