

Undergraduate Research Assistantship Report 2026

My time as an Undergraduate Research Assistant at the LSE Phelan United States Centre has been spent working on the State of the States project, under the supervision of Chris Gilson. The State of the States is a digital platform containing policy case studies for use by local government policymakers in the US. The platform is still evolving, and ultimately aims to provide an apolitical resource for practitioners in US local government to take inspiration from and collaborate with each other on the policy areas that are most important to them.

My primary role in this project was research and writing policy case studies for publication on the platform. This involved finding innovative policies from local government contexts in the US, researching the problem they aimed to solve, how the policy went about trying to solve the problem, and whether the policy was effective. Examples of policies examined were the City of Denver's All In Mile High homelessness approach, and Montgomery County MD's Troubled Properties framework. Outside of these case studies, I also conducted research on other policy resources available to local government policymakers in the US, such as the ICMA, Bloomberg Government, and the National League of Cities, and how said resources compare to the State of the States, as well as contributing to written guidance on research and writing case studies for the platform.

Research for the case studies consisted primarily of finding and synthesising information from local government documentation and press releases, local journalism, think-tank analysis and official data. The case studies were built around quantifiable outcomes, and in conducting research I had to deploy judgement on a given source's credibility and quality. In selecting policies for case studies, a balance needed to be struck between being recent enough to be genuinely innovative and fresh, but not so recent that it was unclear as to the impact of the policy.

I also was able to participate in stakeholder engagement on the project. I contributed to a catalogue of questions about the platform for use in meetings with local government officials and policymakers, in order to learn what it is they want from a platform like the State of the States. In said meetings, I was able to engage in discussion with these stakeholders on the case studies and the wider project, which was a very rewarding experience. The feedback in these meetings has been crucial in the evolution of the State of the States platform and the approach taken within case studies.

The end product of my work has been a set of completed, publicly usable case studies that will be published on the platform, alongside a set of pitched ideas for short and long-term policies tailored to specific jurisdictions and officials.

These case studies have been written and re-written on the basis of continuing stakeholder feedback on the project, and by the end of my time on the project Chris and I had settled on a way of writing case studies that will be carried forward as the platform grows in the near future. To this end, I drafted a case study writing guide for use by future research assistants and policymakers, in order to ensure consistency in the case studies found on the platform and to allow those new to writing case studies to ascertain what is required quickly.

The State of the States continues to be an incredibly important project. Much of the feedback we received from stakeholders in my time on the project detailed how local officials often do not have the time or resources to do serious, dedicated research into innovative policy solutions from other jurisdictions. As such, there is space for a platform that provides easy-to-consume case studies and frictionless discussion with other officials and policymakers, and this is what the State of the States aims to provide.

In summary, contributing to the State of the States has been a brilliant experience. The research area is perfect for anyone who, like me, is passionate about public policy and devolved government, and I was given a lot of responsibility to contribute to substantive questions about the approach to both case studies and the platform in general. I have honed my policy analysis, research, and writing skills, and have gained experience engaging with real-world stakeholders on subjects that truly matter to them. I would like to thank Chris Gilson for being a pleasure to work for and for the way he valued and respected my opinions and contribution to the project. I sincerely believe the State of the States has a very bright future and will have a positive impact on policy diffusion at the local level in the US.