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Public Policy Forum receives two national awards for policy research

Local government finance and early childhood education projects lauded by judging panel

MILWAUKEE, Wisconsin – *Thursday, July 29, 2010* – The Public Policy Forum’s education efforts surrounding local county and municipal budget issues and its groundbreaking three-year research project on high quality early childhood education received national recognition by the Governmental Research Association (GRA) at the GRA’s annual conference in New York City this week.

The Forum received the GRA award for “Most Effective Education” on a local government issue for its 2009 fiscal analyses of Milwaukee County and the City of Milwaukee governments.

Using a set of commonly used and objective fiscal indicators – and complementing them with in-depth analysis and comparisons to other counties and cities – Forum researchers produced two reports that it packaged to bring attention to the long-term structural problems facing each government, many of which are linked to similar circumstances. The first, *Crisis on the Horizon*, was released in March 2009; and the second, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*, was released in September 2009.

“Like many major urban areas across the country, Metropolitan Milwaukee is facing significant financial challenges at both the county and municipal level,” says Forum President Rob Henken. “But unlike many others, the challenges facing Milwaukee’s largest local governments are not simply tied to the economic downturn, but have been building for years. We felt it was critical for elected leaders at both governments and the state to better understand the fundamental causes and impacts of those challenges so that we could have a more informed public debate about how to address them.”

The award recognized not only the quality of the two Forum research products, but also the comprehensive public education effort that was undertaken to disseminate the research findings. Both reports attracted widespread newspaper, radio and television coverage, generated several op ed pieces, and were the subject of public affairs radio and television programming. Forum researchers also presented the findings to more than a dozen government bodies and civic organizations.

The Forum also received the GRA award for “Most Distinguished Research” on a regional government issue for its three-year research project on the economic benefits of early childhood education in southeast Wisconsin. Forum researchers produced nine separate reports that explored how much the region invests in high quality early childhood programs; how parents, teachers and providers feel about the current system; the barriers to achieving high quality in the region; and options for funding system improvements. Taken together, these reports broke new ground in their use of economic analysis to examine the costs and benefits of high quality early childhood education in southeast Wisconsin.

“While our comprehensive analysis built on work performed in other areas of the country, it was a first for Wisconsin,” says Forum Research Director Anneliese Dickman. “The work was premised on the notion that the child care market in the Milwaukee region was not working, as there was neither a supply nor a demand for the type of quality care that would best serve the region’s economic interests. This market failure called for a new public policy of early learning as an economic development tool.”

The award reflected not only the importance and relevancy of the findings, but also the many diverse research methods used in collecting and analyzing the data. In two cases, for example, Forum researchers adapted methods created by other, nationally recognized research institutions to meet its needs and to make use of local primary-source data.

As far as current staff can tell, this is the first year in the Forum’s long history that it has received two GRA awards in the same year. The GRA was founded in 1914 as the national organization of individuals involved in government research. GRA’s annual awards competition is conducted to “recognize exceptional research on state and local governmental issues performed by staff members of governmental research agencies.”

Milwaukee-based Public Policy Forum, established in 1913 as a local government watchdog, is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to enhancing the effectiveness of government and the development of southeastern Wisconsin through objective research of public policy issues.

The award-winning local government fiscal reports can be downloaded by clicking [here](#) and [here](#). The award-winning series of early childhood education reports can be accessed by clicking [here](#).

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