What's New in Civic Tech: Bloomberg's What Works Cities Honors Best at Using Data to Improve Residents' Lives

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Plus, NYC mayor's office issues RFI to promote open and transparent Internet; the Long Beach, Calif., innovation team helps launch new city justice lab; Regional Housing Solutions tool helps stakeholders see variations in Chicago's housing sub-markets; and San Diego's data team is hiring.

by Zack Quaintance / January 25, 2018

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The Bloomberg Philanthropies What Works Cities program recently hit a milestone goal, adding its 100th jurisdiction to the list of cities it supports and advises on how to use data-driven governance to improve quality of life. Now, the program has selected nine of its participating cities to honor for the quality of work they have done to this point.

Bloomberg announced the first-of-its-kind awards in a press release this week. The cities that made the list are Boston; Kansas City, Mo.; Los Angeles; Louisville, Ky.; New Orleans; San Diego; San Francisco; Seattle; and Washington, D.C. They were all chosen for their proven leadership in data-driven government. With this designation will come additional assistance from What Works Cities, aimed at helping to accelerate progress and deepen usage of data.

"Congratulations to each of the nine cities that earned certification for their use of data, which is improving services for people and setting a great example for other cities," said Michael Bloomberg, founder of Bloomberg Philanthropies and three-term mayor of New York City. "Data allows local governments to know what's working and citizens to hold leaders accountable for results — but the fact is, many cities aren't capturing it and putting it to use in making decisions. The more cities that integrate data into their planning and operations, the more progress our country will be able to make on the common challenges we face."

These cities have been deemed "What Works Cities Certified," a designation for which there are three tiers: platinum, gold and silver. None of the cities chosen this year received the platinum award. Los Angeles, however, did obtain the gold status, while the other eight cities on the list received silver.

Los Angeles was singled out because it "demonstrated a strong commitment and impressive track record with data-driven initiatives." Bloomberg cited the way Mayor Eric Garcetti quickly committed to this sort of governance upon taking office, finding data-driven ways to address affordable housing, crime, traffic and pollution.

Information about the other eight certified cities is now up on the program's website.

NYC Mayor's office issues RFI to promote open and transparent Internet

The chief technology officer of the largest city in America is calling upon experts to create a means of monitoring Internet service providers to identify whether the private companies engage in discriminatory practices, New York City officials announced in a press release this week.

On Jan. 22, the CTO's office released what it dubbed a "Truth in Broadband" RFI, seeking "to establish transparency and accountability in how carriers provide Internet services to consumers," read the press release. The goal of this RFI was, quite simply, to get input from the tech and innovation sector that could help the city monitor the performance of Internet service providers.

The announcement of this RFI directly connected it to the FCC's recent decision to repeal Obama-era net neutrality protections, giving Internet service providers the ability to more thoroughly control information on the Internet through connection speeds. Leading up to the rollback of these protections, New York City CTO Miguel Gamiño was one of the loudest opposing voices, warning that such a move would have harmful effects, and that it would present a challenge in New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio's efforts to make his city the most equitable in America.

"Making New York the fairest city in America means protecting the fundamental right to access an open Internet," Mayor de Blasio said in the press release. "We are the first city to take this step as part of our plan to hold Internet service providers accountable for discriminatory practices."

Anyone can respond to the RFI. Responses to the Truth in Broadband RFI are due Feb. 28 and can be submitted at http://on.nyc.gov/truthinbroadbandrfi.

In other New York City CTO news, the office has recently launched a new website built with user-informed and tested design. Gamiño has said he expects more content to be added soon.

Long Beach, Calif., innovation team helps launch new city Justice Lab

The Long Beach, Calif., Innovation Team has helped launch a Justice Lab that is designed to give first responders new tools they can use to help residents leave the criminal justice system and get necessary resources, such as treatment and care.

To build the lab, the Innovation Team partnered with the Long Beach Public Safety Continuum, which is made up of the police, fire, health and development services departments, as well as the city's prosecutor, neighborhood associations, nonprofits and resident volunteers.

In launching this lab, the team analyzed more than 100,000 criminal offenses over a five-year period and determined that 85 percent of them were low-level misdemeanors and not serious crimes. The lab sets out to give police officers, firefighters and other first responders the tools they need to help individuals avoid a deepening cycle of arrest and incarceration.

The lab is working on eight initiatives to do this, two of which are heavy on data-use. The first is a data-sharing agreement, which is a set of established policies and procedures among city

departments to share data, thereby enabling providers to access vital information that will help them serve residents in the criminal justice system. The second is a data warehouse that will bring multiple data sets together in order to crosscheck information about public safety departments and coordinate more comprehensive services.

In a press release announcing the program, city officials said, "The Justice Lab was developed based on the i-team's people-focused and data-driven approach that involved 26 in-depth interviews with people who had 11 or more citations and arrests. Additionally, the i-team spoke with over 21 subject matter experts, participated in over 12 observational visits, and had over 65 participants help co-create the Justice Lab's initiatives."

Regional Housing Solutions tool helps stakeholders see variations in Chicago's housing sub-markets

Chicago has a new tool called Regional Housing Solutions, and it is designed to help municipal officials and staff, as well as policymakers and other stakeholders in the metro area, better understand the housing market.

Regional Housing Solutions gives users the ability to examine variations in local housing sub-markets, identify where common housing challenges exist throughout the Chicagoland area, and determine the best strategies to address ongoing housing challenges. The tool was developed as a joint project by the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP), Metropolitan Mayors Caucus (MMC), and Metropolitan Planning Council (MPC), with technical assistance from DePaul University's Institute for Housing Studies (IHS).

This civic tech project stands as an excellent example of what can be created based on thorough end-user design. To make it happen, developers and others associated with it interviewed more than 100 regional policymakers, realtors, financial institutions, municipal employees, and for- and non-profit housing developers.

One of the most impressive features on the site is an online toolkit that includes a step-by-step guide for municipalities that want to create their own housing policy plans. The genesis of this project dates back to 2004, when the Homes for a Changing Region project was launched by Chicago Metropolis 2020, a local civic group, and a caucus of mayors that included representatives of 275 cities, towns and villages in the Chicagoland area.

San Diego's sunny data team is hiring

For much of the country, it's been a long winter and it's only January.

If you're tired of shoveling snow — or creating data-driven visualizations for snowfall and plow routes — we may have a job opening for you. That's right, sunny San Diego is hiring for its data and analytics team.

Information about the opening can be found via this underline medium post by San Diego Chief Data Officer Maksim Pecherskiy, who was probably out walking in the sun this morning, while you were busy scaping the ice off your windshield again.