What Does it Mean to Be a Smart City Leader?

DISCUSSION BRIEF

❯ Overview

Over the past 5 years, Econsult Solutions completed [cutting edge research on smart cities around the world](), exploring how leading global cities begin their smart city journey, what they were investing in, and what those investments meant in terms of return on investment. We have learned that the use of technology in cities can improve government performance, increase economic competitiveness, and allow cities to explore new solutions to their most significant problems. But we have also learned that there are numerous challenges facing communities as they begin their journeys towards being a smart and connected city, and that there are obstacles and hurdles that even the most advanced and sophisticated city must overcome to make the most of their investments.

In the past two years, city leaders have been forced to rethink and refine what they mean when they think about being a smart city. A confluence of interconnected health, economic, social, political, financial, and technological challenges has meant that local governments have had to be more flexible and creative as they deliver services, protect their citizens, and invest in their economic futures. Think about just some of the huge challenges that cities are facing:

- **Healthy Communities** –The COVID-19 pandemic has focused our attention on how we can help citizens remain safe in the face of a crippling epidemic affecting all corners of our communities. Communications with citizens has become crucial to provide lifesaving information, and those cities with strong data analysis tools and capabilities have been better prepared to map and track outbreaks in their cities. The use of technology in providing health care, through the adoption and use of telemedicine, has allowed health care to be provided safely and efficiently through an internet connection. How we ensure equitable and secure access could transform health care delivery and outcomes.
- **Technology Access** – Of course, the use of technology in a city is only as good as the internet and technology access of the local citizens. The impacts of COVID restrictions -- increased numbers of workers working from home, schools providing distance learning, accessing government services online – have exposed the uneven access across cities and the difficulties in meeting those needs. Small towns and rural communities often lack the connections needed to be competitive in a connected economy.
- **Economic Inequality** – The economic shifts that occurred as a result of the pandemic and it's impacts also exposed the growing economic inequality of our cities. Where you work, how you work, access to technology, exposure to COVID and much more have contributed

to extreme shifts in income levels across our cities. How we address those inequities through smart policies will be crucial to future success of cities.

- **Sustainability and resilience** -- While the impacts of climate change and extreme weather events predate the pandemic, cities and their citizens are feeling the impacts on what seems to be an increasingly regular basis. Whether it be power grid failures in Texas, tornadoes in major metros, increased flooding from stormwater runoff in urban communities, or extreme heat in our largest cities, it is clear that cities and communities are being asked to address challenges at an increasing pace. We can't afford to wait, and cities are crucial to meeting the global sustainability goals.
- **Uncertain finances** – The shifts and changes of the pandemic have also created potential shifts in city finances. Cities reliant on local income, sales and property taxes are tracking how shifts in where people live, and work will change that economic model. Fewer workers in offices can mean fewer lunches being bought, reductions in transit ridership, and lower office occupancy – all of which have significant financial implications.

〉 Questions We Will Address

With all of this going on, how are city leaders coping, adapting, and even thriving? Over the next year, ESI is looking to learn more by addressing some core questions as we look to learn how cities are refining their definition of what it means to be a smart city:

- What have city leaders learned about the use of technology during multiple crises and what does that mean for future investments?
- How will the federal infrastructure bill and flexible ARPA funding impact city strategies and investments in technology and sustainability initiatives?
- How are private sector partners working with cities to address core challenges in technology access, economic inequality, and resilience?
- What will emerging technologies, like 5G, artificial intelligence, blockchain and cryptocurrencies mean for the future of cities?
- How have city leaders integrated smart city planning with recovery planning to build sustainable futures?

〉 A Focus on Emerging Smart Cities and their Leaders

The COVID-19 pandemic has upended the normal thinking about location and place, allowing smaller cities and suburban communities to compete on equal terms with larger cities for remote workers, flexible businesses, and new investment. As they moved into their new hometowns, they brought with them expectations for government services and interactions, such as:

- Development of strategies for online payments, permitting and registrations;
- Adoption of smart mobility tools like connected traffic lights, on-demand transportation, and real time transit tracking; and
- Partnering for quality-of-life enhancements such as smart lighting, community wi-fi, connected message boards.

In addition, emerging challenges will require creative approaches to allow smaller communities to remain competitive. Some of these challenges include:

- Preparing communities for coming advances and adoption of electric vehicle and self-driving vehicles;
- Tracking and identifying the growing impacts of climate change and extreme weather events on community infrastructure and facilities;
- Ensuring that citizens and city workers have the connections, tools, and training to adapt to a more connected community and economy.

In our research, we will develop an understanding of how leaders in emerging smart cities are meeting these challenges, what is needed in terms of new policies and partnerships, and the opportunities for engagement and investment in those communities for businesses and institutions.

❯ Methodology

Econsult Solutions experts and partners will conduct a rigorous research program, comprising rich quantitative and insightful qualitative analysis:

- Structured interviews with leaders from 20-30 cities responsible for smart city policy and implementation to understand how their cities have leveraged new technologies and strategies to deal with multiple crises and challenges over the past 2 years and how they plan to adapt and respond to future challenges.
- An interactive tool enabling city leaders and partners to make connections and compare their use of smart technology to attain sustainable social and economic outcomes.
- In-depth case studies highlighting the work of city leaders and managers that are leveraging and using technology to promote sustainability and citizen-centricity, with insights into their practices and strategies.
- An easy-to-use guide that will provide city leaders with an easy-to-use checklist for prioritization, decision making, and financial analysis.

❯ Program Deliverables

The *What Does It Mean to be a Smart City Leader* initiative will produce a rich set of deliverables. As a contribution to the general knowledge around Smart Cities and the use of technology in cities, we will produce a readable and media-friendly report, executive summary, and infographics that highlight our key findings, lessons learned and the products available.

For our city partners, we will provide them with searchable database of smart city leaders, programs, and achievements in peer cities around the United States. We will also produce a "Guide for Leaders", summarizing lessons from peers and templates for decision-making. Finally, we will offer a private webinar/virtual conference highlighting the findings of the report and allowing for interaction between and among city leaders and managers.

For our sponsors and strategic advisors, we will provide them detailed survey results, in an easy to use and customize online database format (like Tableau or Power BI). We will also provide up to 10 hours of direct research support for your own thought leadership efforts

〉 Project Plan

A high-level, preliminary plan for our start date, with key milestones such as when we will begin collecting preliminary data, sharing our findings, developing deliverables, and releasing our findings. Typically accompanied by a bulleted list of preliminary plans which are subject to change.

Month 1 – Establish sponsor coalition. Begin work on research objectives and methodology. Hold kick-off meeting, review research agenda, and begin primary research.

Month 2 – Identify and recruit city partners for interviews, in-depth data analysis. Meet with project sponsors to establish roles, preview project and promotional plans.

Months 2 - 4 – Conduct interviews, collect and analyze data, develop case studies. Meet with sponsor team to review preliminary findings, develop themes for report.

Months 4 - 5 – Prepare draft deliverables (report, web tools, , review draft with sponsor team, finalize deliverables, develop marketing materials, finalize marketing plan.

Month 6 – Public release of core deliverables; joint promotion by sponsor coalition.

Months 7 - 8 – Post-release follow-up; Custom follow-up with work with sponsor research and promotion teams.

〉 Sponsor Benefits

In addition to the program deliverables, sponsors will receive the following benefit opportunities depending on level of sponsorship:

- Direct input into the research methodology, scope, and questions.
- Ability to shape the research agenda and network with other business and urban leaders through advisory board meetings.
- Full rights to use all program research and deliverables for internal and external purposes, including for developing your own branded materials.
- Top-quality thought leadership and evidence-based analysis to build brand awareness and generate sales leads.
- Wide brand exposure on all program deliverables and marketing materials.
- Opportunities for co-marketing and joint business development with other sponsors and research partners.
- Sector exclusivity to gain greater value from the research and marketing campaign; lead sponsors can exclude their top competitors in their sector.
- Targeted networking
- Ongoing personal access to the ESI team to help you build the analysis into tailored go-to-market plans and thought leadership programs.