

IBM's Smarter Cities Challenge

Fresno

Summary report

Introduction

The City of Fresno, California, USA was one of 31 cities worldwide selected to receive an IBM Smarter Cities Challenge® grant in 2013 as part of IBM's citizenship efforts to build a Smarter Planet®. Between 22 April and 10 May 2013, a team of six IBM experts worked to deliver recommendations on key challenges identified by Mayor Ashley Swearingin and her senior leadership team for improving downtown economic development and revitalization.

The challenge

Fresno is California's fifth largest city, with a population exceeding 500,000. It is located in the San Joaquin Valley, at the geographic center of the state. Fresno serves as the economic hub of California's Central Valley, with surrounding cities predominantly tied to large-scale agricultural production. The San Joaquin Valley region is the 17th largest agricultural area in the world, feeding one-third of the world's population with \$26 billion in agricultural production. It is the most productive agricultural region in the world, cultivating more than 350 crops.

However, the city and region suffer from extreme poverty. Within Fresno, 85% of students are eligible for free or reduced lunch programs, and the city's unemployment rate is 14%. The economic center of Fresno has migrated north, encroaching on precious farmland while emptying the downtown area.

Second-term Mayor Ashley Swearingin challenged the IBM Smarter Cities Challenge team to:

Create actionable recommendations focused on:

- *Revitalization of the downtown Fulton Mall area*
- *Leveraging broadband to expand economic growth*
- *Data sharing and open data*

Findings

Fresno is one of seven cities to benefit from Strong Cities, Strong Communities (SC2), a White House initiative to provide federal agency support for economically distressed communities. In addition to other partnerships, this has laid the groundwork for the team to provide actionable recommendations.



Highlights:

Findings in three key areas:

- Economic development
- Infrastructure
- Culture

Five key recommendations:

- Implement quick wins
 - Develop a CitiStat model
 - Adopt a city branding campaign
 - Drive broadband adoption
 - Nurture ag tech
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The team's findings are in the areas of economic development, infrastructure and culture.

Under the economic development theme, the team found:

1. A unique agricultural technology (ag tech) opportunity
2. Limited retention of the food value chain
3. A disconnect between the ag tech growth vision and the importance of downtown

Under the infrastructure theme, the team's research and interviews discovered:

1. Broadband is widely available, but adoption is a challenge
2. A lack of appropriately skilled workforce
3. The City's technology does not support its collaboration needs

Under the culture theme, the team found:

1. Bias toward long-term initiatives versus quick action
2. Strong relationships operating in silos
3. The need for a mindset change about Fresno

Recommendations

The city has unique assets that could enable it to revitalize its downtown area and economy. These assets include workforce and crop diversity; an innovation platform for food and water; proximity to fields, farmers and crops; strong relationships among bonding communities; and affordable homes for millennials (the generation born between 1980 and 2000) and families. The team analyzed these assets alongside the compelling reasons to act, which resulted in five major recommendations.

1. Implement quick wins

Quick wins could promote a new belief system and encourage visible vitality in the downtown area. Suggested wins include determining baseline data sets that will help the City quantify existing economic vitality and demonstrate improvement; the introduction of entertainment clusters, a small public food market and cultural events to enhance downtown foot traffic; and use of social media by local businesses to increase their potential audience.

2. Develop a CitiStat model

CitiStat is a management model of regular meetings focused on sharing and tracking data to enable data-driven decision making. Such a model would help City agencies to communicate more effectively in delivering cross-function tasks. This would help facilitate citizen engagement in supporting downtown and community revitalization efforts.

3. Adopt a city branding campaign

The team recommends partnering with the California State University, Fresno (Fresno State) business program to develop branding messages targeting Fresnans, ag tech firms and millennials first, before expanding them to a global audience. The City should collaborate with a creative agency to plan systematic deployment of the branding and marketing campaign to help celebrate its assets and begin to change the mindset of Fresnans.

4. Drive broadband adoption

With the current availability of high-speed broadband, the City should focus on adoption of Internet marketing technologies for downtown businesses while continuing to collaborate with organizations in supporting digital literacy for the underserved.

5. Nurture ag tech

The City should capture economic development opportunities by leveraging its unique regional agricultural assets to nurture growth and support the ag tech cluster. It should start by forming an advisory council with regional stakeholders to quantify ag tech market characteristics and develop market insights. A formalized partnership with the USDA to identify, analyze and categorize relevant government data sources will help.

Conclusion

The City of Fresno and its downtown area will thrive again as it has in the past once its cultural challenges are addressed, getting all Fresnans on board for their own benefit as well as the City's. In the longer run, the City should use the outcomes of the recommendations to master data-driven management, which would continue to support the sustainable economic and social development initiatives.

For more information

To learn more, send an email to ccca@us.ibm.com or visit smartercitieschallenge.org

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