

IBM's Smarter Cities Challenge

Jacksonville

Summary report

Jacksonville, Florida, was one of 33 cities selected to receive a Smarter Cities® Challenge grant from IBM in 2012 as part of IBM's citizenship efforts to build a Smarter Planet™. Since the program's inception in 2010, 64 cities have received Smarter Cities Challenge grants, and many of these have already made great progress on the road to becoming more instrumented, interconnected and intelligent (additional information available at www.smartercitieschallenge.org). During three weeks in August 2012, a team of five IBM experts worked to deliver recommendations on a key challenge identified by Mayor Alvin Brown, his leadership team and a wide range of stakeholders: establish a renewed identity for the Jacksonville community through revitalization of the downtown area's urban core, utilizing a cohesive, measurable and actionable approach.

Context

For the City of Jacksonville, downtown revitalization interconnects with the sustainable economic growth of the entire city. This revitalization is dependent on creating a “draw” to downtown. Jacksonville has had success creating well-considered downtown development plans, but 20 years of severe economic downturns and differing priorities of various administrations have created gaps in the consistent execution and governance of such plans, particularly in the area of private investment. As a result, business was not stimulated as expected.

To date, Jacksonville has been successful in attracting business offices downtown, creating a steady flow of people in the downtown area during the typical workday. Maximizing the use of downtown real estate, however, requires mixed-use properties, designed for multiple purposes and frequently combining residential, retail and office space. Since 2000, less than 1 percent of all completed development projects have been mixed-use, but mixed-use development is approaching 50 percent of the proposed non-transportation development projects. By filling downtown with properties that encourage a continuous flow of people, Jacksonville can efficiently address its goal of increasing density, occupancy and revenue in the downtown area.

Highlights:

- Jacksonville has a passionate community eager to evolve thoughtful planning into achievable revitalization.
 - Focusing people, funding and resources on strategic locations will create catalysts for citywide engagement and investment.
 - Strong governance and informed decision making, combined with robust communications and measurement, will ensure long-term growth resulting from short-term accomplishments.
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The challenge

Mayor Brown asked IBM to help the City develop a cohesive executive plan that will begin, in earnest, the revitalization of the downtown area's urban core. While there had been prior research generating various studies on this issue, the City asked the IBM team to focus on a plan that provided short- and long-term recommendations with the support and long-term commitment of the community and that would:

- Create a consistent definition of the downtown boundaries.
- Be a cohesive and strategic plan embraced by the entire community.
- Include efficient transportation planning.
- Promote the downtown area as an employment center, as well as a robust entertainment center.
- Address the lack of funding for downtown capital investment.
- Address the need for increased density and higher occupancy.
- Identify opportunities for the relocation or repurposing of city buildings located on prime riverfront property.
- Improve the marketability of the downtown core through improvements to issues such as parking, the homeless and safety.

Findings

The IBM team conducted a SWOT analysis and interviewed nearly 80 citizens representing the City, academia, nonprofit organizations, philanthropic organizations, clergy, downtown residents, police and local developers. It became clear that, while individual initiatives have been implemented, the City lacks an integrated, cohesive and time-ordered roadmap for coordinating activities and working toward common goals.

The team also reviewed available data on crime, housing, social services and downtown development in order to formulate a concentrated, transformational plan to help create opportunities for growth and economic expansion. This type of plan will ensure quality design standards and assist with the development process that captures important initiatives necessary to evolve the downtown area into the environment citizens and visitors desire.

Recommendations

The IBM team developed a set of short-, medium- and long-term recommendations:

- Adopt a Balanced Scorecard methodology to translate vision to strategy, measure progress and enforce accountability.
- Adopt an optimization-based, roadmapping approach to facilitate multi-criterion decision making.
- Establish a Roadmap Management Office to manage development and progression of the roadmap.
- Create an "epicenter for growth" to funnel the City's investment funds, in a cohesive and integrated manner, to a specific area within the existing downtown improvement district.
- Implement near-term projects to create attractiveness to draw people downtown, including regular special events programming, short-term beautification initiatives, code enforcement, the development of a dedicated brand identity and communications campaign, and synchronization of transportation to businesses with increased wayfarer signage.
- Develop downtown residential units to accommodate at least 15,000 citizens by 2015.
- Build and expand urban parks.

Conclusion

Jacksonville, Florida, has the potential to transform itself through the revitalization of its downtown area, leveraging its natural resources, property assets and the passion of its citizens. The City needs to share its vision and engage stakeholders willing to contribute to economic growth through urban renewal. Through informed decision making and process management, Jacksonville can consistently measure and track growth and capture additional opportunities in the future as it moves forward on its journey toward revitalization.

For more information

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

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