

Building an i-Team: Bloomberg Philanthropies and the City of Centennial

Interview with Scott Blumenreich, Innovation Team Manager, City of Centennial, CO



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The Grant

In 2014, Bloomberg Philanthropies' announced a \$45 million expansion of its Innovation Teams program, including grants to 14 additional cities - twelve in the U.S. and two international. Innovation teams (i-teams) function as in-house innovation consultants, helping cities to resolve their most pressing issues by applying innovative techniques and data-driven strategies.

The City of Centennial, CO, a community of approximately 106,000 residents served by only 53 government employees, was among the latest round of grantees selected to

participate in the program. Centennial's lean organizational structure, a distinct quality among cities of similar size, has enabled the City to be increasingly adaptive and flexible when it comes to implementing new solutions. Of the cities participating in the program, Centennial is one of the few operating under a Council-Manager form of government, and its suburban setting, just outside of Denver, makes it a unique case for the program, as areas surrounding urban cores tend to come with a different set of challenges.

The Challenge

With Centennial at the heart of the rapidly expanding South Metro Denver Region, the city chose to initially focus on issues involving transportation and mobility, seeking high-tech solutions based on data and scientific research methods. Specific focus areas include tackling traffic congestion, reducing overall time on the road and improving mobility and accessibility for all people – including seniors and people with disabilities - across all modes of transportation. The i-team started out by looking into the root causes of these issues, such as the "inconvenience factor" and cultural aversion to public transportation.

The Team

Since the grant was awarded, Centennial has assembled its fast paced, interdisciplinary i-team to carry out the goals of the grant. The new team is made of four in-house staff members tasked with living up to their mission of "*Embedding Innovation in City Government*" and facilitating long-term change - what a job description! Further, the team functions as an in-house innovation consultancy that assesses problems, generates innovative responses, and develops partnerships to fix existing problems.

A photo of the team is attached (From Left to Right): Melanie Morgan, Innovation Team Data Analyst; Bailey Little, Team Coordinator; Daniel Hutton, Innovation Team Project Manager and Scott Blumenreich, Innovation Team Manager.

The Shared Benefits

The Alliance is well aware of the many obstacles that often prevent local government organizations from being able to innovate in every area because of the various financial, political and cultural barriers they face. Bloomberg Philanthropies' Innovation Teams program has created a way to help cities come up with out of the box solutions and gain the political support needed to go the extra mile, while also providing funding to help cities abate the financial constraints that often prevent innovation and the calculated risk-taking it requires.

The outcomes of the program will not only impact the City of Centennial, but surrounding cities and their shared partners and stakeholders as well. Communication has been key to the process, and the i-team has been and will continue reaching out to local and

regional groups, stakeholders, partners, colleges and other municipalities to collaborate. The i-team hopes that facilitating this collaborative process will ultimately lead to success for the region through improved mobility for all people, with long-lasting and far-reaching impacts.

What's next?

Currently, the team is finishing up "framing" the issues - collecting baseline data and identifying contributing factors to clearly identify the problems and their root causes. Using a data-based approach, the team will then develop one or more initiatives to try and change current paradigms. Moving into Phase Two, the team will begin leveraging their processes and solutions to help deal with other challenges, with the goal of embedding an organizational-wide innovative culture. The team currently has tremendous support at the City Council and executive levels, setting the City on a clear route to transform the entire organization.

More about Bloomberg Philanthropies

Bloomberg Philanthropies' mission is to ensure better, longer lives for the greatest number of people. The organization focuses on five key areas for creating lasting change: Public Health, Environment, Education, Government Innovation and the Arts. Bloomberg Philanthropies encompasses all of Michael R. Bloomberg's charitable activities, including his foundation and his personal giving. In 2014, Bloomberg Philanthropies distributed \$462 million. For more information on the philanthropy, please visit bloomberg.org or follow them on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter @BloombergDotOrg.

Sources:

American City and County - <http://americancityandcounty.com/pubwks/public-works-outsourcing-system-20101207>

City of Centennial Press Release: www.CentennialCO.gov/Iteam

Bloomberg Philanthropies: <http://www.bloomberg.org/program/government-innovation/innovation-teams/>

The Denver Channel Press Release:

<http://www.thedenverchannel.com/news/front-range/centennial/centennial-among-14-cities-awarded-innovation-team-grant-from-michael-bloomberg-foundation>