



Smart Communities: More than Big Cities

No Such Thing as Too Small

When you hear about “Smart” initiatives in the news, do you instantly picture places like Boston, MA; San Francisco, CA; or Chicago, IL? Only large cities with advanced traffic management centers, huge transit systems, and populations in the millions could possibly have the need and resources for building “smart” solutions, right?

The truth is that most communities are working to improve efficiencies and quality of life, including communities with less than 5,000 residents, and even some of those small communities are applying technology to those goals. Sometimes it is the small communities leading the way with new technologies, because implementation is simpler at that scale to test out new ideas.

Right Sizing Solutions

Ketchum, Idaho is one well-publicized example of a small community implementing smart projects. At just over 2,700 residents, the community has implemented a number of smart projects to improve mobility within the community. These projects range from enhanced signage for pedestrians and cyclists to smart streetlights. These investments are having big impacts on the quality of life for local residents.

Regionalization

A critical challenge and opportunity for all communities is that transportation infrastructure doesn’t end at municipal boundaries. By working with neighboring communities on critical corridors and regional transportation solutions, communities are seeing greater benefits and cost sharing efficiencies. Many of these discussions can begin at the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) or Regional Planning Commission (RPC) level. Ask your neighbors what they are doing and how you can partner with them to achieve these economies of scale.

Funding

Consider all the potential benefits when looking to fund projects, and don’t stay within the silo of your own department or field. Collaborations between engineers, planners, and community health specialists can lead to new perspectives, such as a public health grant to fund a transportation investment. Reach out to other staff within your community, neighboring communities, and the county or RPC to explore these ideas. And look for vendors of smart equipment and services that are eager to demonstrate their products—Public-Private Partnerships that share the risks and costs of new data-oriented solutions are common.

How ITE Can Help

The first step for ITE members is to join the Smart Communities page on ITE Community:

www.ite.org/smartcommunities/.

Your ITE peers can help you self-evaluate your readiness to pursue smart solutions to today’s challenges:

1. Do I have political support from elected officials or citizens?
2. Have I established nimble goals and ways to pivot if necessary?
3. Do I want to invest my time into this?

If you have questions or would like more information on the ITE Smart Communities initiative, please contact the ITE Smart Communities Task Force (SCoTF) at smartcommunities@ite.org.