



How Does a Community Become "Smart"?

Start with a Plan

The very first step a community can do on its progression to becoming a Smart Community is know what data it already has and how these data can be gathered, manipulated, and made usable. Then, identifying data your community seeks is a key step. This will have to be done in tandem with some of the areas below, particularly with the focus of the plan. Finally, identify your partners (people who will help get you where you need to go), stakeholders (those who will benefit and use the smart aspects), and potential opponents and obstacles.

Focus the Plan

This is the most crucial step to the success of the Smart Community initiatives in your community. Ask yourself: what are my community's biggest needs? An excellent example is from Columbus, Ohio's Smart City Challenge application, in which the city linked transportation access to infant mortality: poor transportation was literally killing residents. Another example in Kansas City ties violent crime and poor education to lack of internet access; providing Wi-Fi in key areas is anticipated to improve education and job access to residents. Finding solutions to a problem, and measuring the success, is a critical component of being smart.

Once the compelling and transformational areas of the plan are identified, prioritizing the needs and the solutions to those needs into high, medium, and low categories will aid the community to determine which projects could have the greatest impacts to the citizens. The result places the solutions and their implementation into short-, medium-, and long-term projects. This is a key area for community input that ultimately leads to consensus and buy-in.

Finally, identifying potential hurdles to success will help the community navigate through planning, projects, and outcomes. One of the larger obstacles can be funding, but with partnerships this can be overcome. Without any buy-in, community support could be absent and result in failure of the projects and criticism of public officials. Finally, an institutional assessment is needed to identify what resources exist and where there are gaps—don't go forward without the adequate resources to complete the task.

You Are Smarter Than You Think

If you're reading some of these points and they are not surprising to you, that's because they're basic principles that can be quickly overlooked by the "wow factor" of new technology. There are existing smart aspects to your community; now connect them in accordance with the plan. If you build from what you have, you will maximize existing technology and resources while expanding your reach into the community to make a significant difference in people's lives.

Don't Follow, Lead

Just because one community deploys something to address their need does not mean it needs to be deployed in your community. Deploying technology for technology's sake does not help the community, nor does it help the elected officials and staff defend the deployment in times of tight budgets and increasing scrutiny. Be sure to find the technology solution for your specific community. Deploy technology that fits community needs and integrates smoothly with existing infrastructure. Write your own scope and requirements and choose a vendor wisely!

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.