Innovation in Action

VOLUME 6

Introduction

What do you get when advances in information technology are coupled with the creativity that comes from managing tight budgets in an era of increasing demands on government services? The answer is innovation.

Every day, there are new reports of state, county and municipal officials leading the way to more efficient and effective service delivery. The next iteration of our eBook series, "Innovation in Action," captures five stories of how innovators are making groundbreaking advances in areas ranging from emergency operations to transportation asset management to data analytics to records management.

Michael Grass
Executive Editor, *Route Fifty*
Government Executive Media Group

ROUTE FIFTY

Figuring Out What Makes the Best-Managed Cities Tick

'What Works Cities,' an expanding Bloomberg Philanthropies program, aims to create maturity models for local governments, using data to get 'a better picture of what good looks like.'

BY MICHAEL GRASS

One of the common themes in the world of municipal best practices is how to take the pioneering models of what works and adapt them for use in other local governments. While every jurisdiction is different, there's increasing interest in trying to pinpoint formulas, methods and applications that are common in the highest-functioning and best-managed cities.

"We're trying to get a better picture of what good looks like," Beth Blauer, executive director of the Johns Hopkins University Center for Government Excellence, said at the 2015 Code for America Summit in October in Oakland, California.

Blauer is one of the leading forces behind What Works Cities, a $42 million initiative launched in April and spearheaded by the Bloomberg Philanthropies in conjunction with Results for America, the Johns Hopkins University Center for Government Excellence, the Government Performance Lab at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government, the Sunlight Foundation and the Behavioral Insights Team.

The non-profit and academic coalition is in the process of identifying 100 so-called "What Works Cities" around the United States and announced the first eight participating jurisdictions in August—Chattanooga, Tennessee; Jackson, Mississippi; Kansas

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City, Missouri; Louisville, Kentucky; Mesa, Arizona; New Orleans, Louisiana; Seattle, Washington; and Tulsa, Oklahoma.

The What Works Cities program connects the participating cities with technical assistance on how to better use their data to make more informed policy and operations decisions.

the cities that they're looking at closely for future inclusion, noting that "the cities already on this panel were already advanced" in their data practices, referring to the representatives from Louisville, New Orleans and Seattle at the workshop session.

While the What Works Cities program is "looking for champions below the mayoral level" interested in

"The idea is that we're creating maturity models here. The idea is to look at what those best practices are and bring them back to the cities."

BETH BLAUER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY CENTER FOR GOVERNMENT EXCELLENCE

"The idea is that we're creating maturity models here," Blauer said during a Code for America Summit workshop featuring officials from three of the previously announced What Works Cities, Louisville, New Orleans and Seattle. "The idea is to look at what those best practices are and bring them back to the cities," she said.

Around 110 cities had applied to be part of the program and additional cities will be named on a rolling basis through 2017.

Blauer detailed some of the characteristics of data-driven approaches to municipal management, she said, the program wants mayors to apply as a sign of "commitment," in particular, mayors who have already embraced many of the program's driving principles.

Additionally, the program is looking for "stability," Blauer said, so if the end of one mayoral administration is in sight, What Works Cities will likely choose a city with executive leadership that will be sticking around for few years.

Data, performance and analytics are central to the What Works Cities program.

Jackson and Mesa will be implementing open data practices for the first time while the rest of the eight initial cities will be strengthening their existing open data practices. Jackson and Tulsa will also be implementing mayoral-led performance-management programs while Chattanooga, Kansas City and Mesa will build upon existing programs.

"I'm a firm believer in when you have facts in front of you, it is transformational," said Seattle's deputy mayor for operations, Kate Joncas, who was part of a What Works Cities workshop panel, along with Michele Jolin, CEO of Results for America; Theresa Reno-Weber, chief of performance and technology in the Louisville Metro government; and Oliver Wise, director of performance and accountability in city of New Orleans.

Joncas said that Seattle Mayor Ed Murray has emphasized efficient and effective public services as part of his administration. A big problem Seattle City Hall struggles with, Joncas said, is homelessness.

That's not for a lack of trying to address the pervasive problem. Seattle spends roughly $40 million on programs to assist the city's homeless population—a January 2015 headcount of the homeless population in King County, which includes Seattle, found 3,772 men, women and children living without shelter.

City funding for homeless services is distributed through 400 separate contracts.

It's easier to count the number of sandwiches that are handed out, Joncas said, than assess the effectiveness of programs in getting the city's homeless people off the streets and into more stable housing situations. And the What Works Cities program will help Seattle ascertain the costs and benefits of its contracting strategy.

In a follow-up workshop session on municipal data analytics, Blauer and Wise joined Mike Flowers, New York City's first chief analytics officer under then-Mayor Michael Bloomberg, and Abhi Nemani, former chief data officer for the city of Los Angeles.

Wise, whose efforts leading analytics and performance management efforts in New Orleans—particularly BlightStat—have been nationally recognized, stressed that the tangible results of a municipal data program isn't simply a "giant map" that displays municipal data.

As Wise described it, the data analytics push at New Orleans City Hall "was about a process and a shift of perspective in how that data could be used." He also said that with data analytics, there's a critical distinction when looking at those practices when compared to traditional performance management methods.

"It's a different mindset than performance management which is about ratcheting up tension," Wise said. "Data analytics is about ratcheting down tension."

In other words, data analytics dissects and assesses the methods and information needed to manage municipal programs and make decisions where performance management is often focused on the pure results.

"Analytics is the really next logical step for performance management shops" in city halls that have them, Wise said.

The first big steps in the creation of a city hall data analytics operation aren't necessarily about going out to find an advanced IT analytics platform, Wise said.

It's far more important getting the right people within a municipal government to the table from the start, and that includes the technologists, policy leaders and data practitioners.

"When you get the right people in the room, the friction melts away" when everyone sees the value in the transformational opportunities that come with better data leveraging, Blauer said during the first session.

"The conversation should come first, then the data," Wise said, echoing Blauer's statement.

> **"I'm a firm believer in when you have facts in front of you, it is transformational."**
>
> KATE JONCAS, SEATTLE'S DEPUTY MAYOR FOR OPERATIONS

As things go along, one important goal in creating a shared vision within a municipal government regarding data and analytics is to create "a loop," Reno-Weber said, "where people put in data and then use their own data, then they audit it themselves."

Keeping things simple is also important, panelists at both workshop sessions agreed. A data analytics push for municipal governments shouldn't be about an expansion of data collection for departments. That can add to the workloads of already overburdened civil servants.

If you want a department to collect new sets of data, you need to "illustrate the problem that you're going to solve," Blauer said. And that shouldn't come before harvesting the low-hanging fruit.

"Inventorying the data that exists will get you where you want to be," Blauer said.

Flowers noted that there's already data out there that isn't being used, pointing to a predictive analytics project with roots in New Orleans that used existing census block data to figure out areas of the city that were less likely to have homes with smoke detectors.

The company Flowers now works for, New York City-based data analytics company Enigma, worked with New Orleans to turn that project into a free, open-source tool that any city government can use to better target efforts to encourage the use of home smoke detectors or distribute free smoke detectors.

It was "crappy federal data that we turned into an actionable tool," Flowers said, describing the relatively low-tech data approach for creating the tool, called Smoke Signals.

"There is existing data with exceedingly high value if used in the right way," he said.

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ROUTE FIFTY

A New Analytics Tool Helps Predict Where There's a Lack of Home Smoke Detectors

Smoke Signals uses publicly available information, is open source and is free.

BY BILL LUCIA

In an effort to help reduce the number of lives lost in home fires each year, a tech company launched an online analytics tool in September, which aims to map the locations in dozens of U.S. cities where households are least likely to have smoke alarms installed.

Getting the alarms into more residences is seen as a key way to prevent fatalities in fires.

Designed by the New York-based company Enigma, the tool is called Smoke Signals. It's open source, free and uses publicly available data. Currently, it includes interactive maps featuring granular geographic areas known as census blocks for 178 U.S. cities. Each block is scored based on the estimated risk that homes there do not have smoke detectors in place.

The scores are based on a predictive statistical model that incorporates data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

"Our hope is that it can be adopted by major—by any—U.S. fire departments," Marc DaCosta, Enigma's chairman and co-founder said during an interview. "This is really intended to be a tool for someone who is trying to organize on-the-ground outreach efforts."

Noting that 25,000 people are either hurt or killed in fires around the country in a typical year, he added: "One should be able to drive that number down."

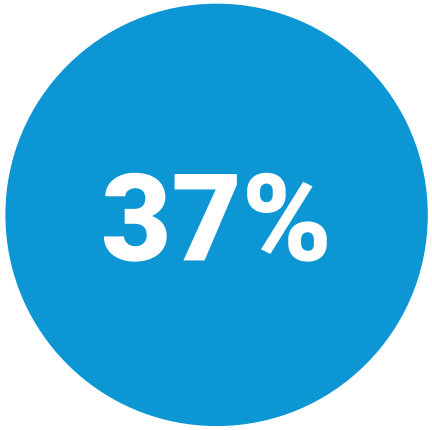
According to the National Fire Protection Association, between 2007 and 2011, 37 percent of U.S. home fire fatalities happened in residences without the devices.

National Fire Incident Reporting System data for 328,346 residential blazes between 2011 and 2013 show

JOSHUA EARLE/UNSPLASH

that at least 71,957 of the incidents took place in homes without smoke alarms. During that same timeframe, an average of 2,530 people died each year in residential fires.

Cities, such as Washington, D.C., and Seattle, as well as organizations like the American Red Cross, have programs that provide free smoke alarms to qualified residents.



PERCENT OF U.S. HOME FIRE FATALITIES THAT HAPPENED IN RESIDENCES WITHOUT SMOKE ALARMS.

But it can be hard for those doing outreach to know where to find the people that lack the alarms—which doors to knock on in other words.

"The conventional wisdom of how to solve that problem was just to, kind of, go on a gut feeling, or go set up a table at the mall," DaCosta said.

That's where Smoke Signals comes in. Instead of an ad hoc approach, outreach efforts can be directed toward households that lack the devices.

The analytics tool has roots in an initiative Enigma worked on in New Orleans earlier this year.

A tragic fire struck struck a residence without a smoke alarm in the city's Broadmoor neighborhood in 2014, killing five people, including three children. The incident drew attention to the problem of homes without smoke detectors. The five deaths were among 22 fatalities that occurred in structure fires in New Orleans between 2010 and 2014 and, as Mayor Mitch Landrieu's office noted in March, "In nearly all cases, no smoke alarms were present."

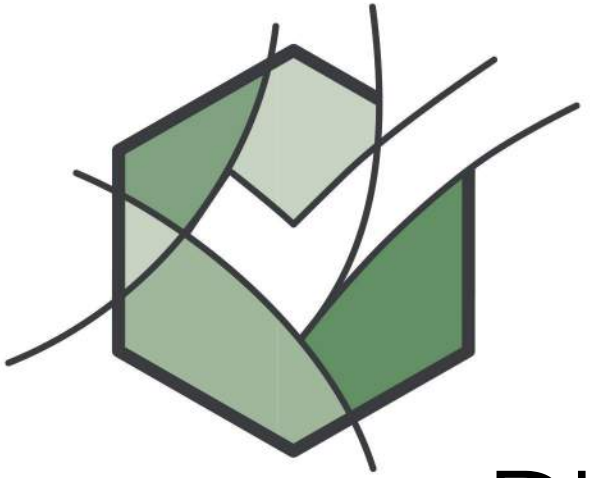
So the city decided to develop a predictive analytics model that could guide door-to-door outreach efforts meant to get the alarms installed in more city homes.

Enigma provided technical assistance and peer review on the project.

But, for Enigma, the work in New Orleans set the stage for Smoke Signals. "We already had the data, so to speak, for the rest of the country," DaCosta said. So when it came to developing a similar tool for more cities, he explained: "It seemed like a very achievable goal."

Enigma is about four years old. Its business model centers on helping companies, as well as government organizations, improve the ways they organize, explore and use data.

DaCosta described the company's work as heavily focused on how to get data "into a shape where it can actually start to drive decision-making." He sees Smoke Signals as just one example of what's possible when this approach is applied in the public sector. "For us it's about trying to promote data-driven decision making in government as a best practice," he said, "and as something that's very achievable given the state of technology today."



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Why Houston Untethered Its 311 System After Hurricane Ike

During an emergency, technology allows operators to work from anywhere.

BY DAVE NYCZEPIR

The city of Houston understands the importance of keeping its "mission critical" 311 call center operators in play after Hurricane Ike blew out its downtown building's windows in September 2008.

The third-costliest storm in U.S. history—causing 195 deaths and $19.3 billion in damage as far south as Galveston, Texas—saw Space City's 311 calls jump from 5,800 to 25,000 a day overnight, before shutting the center down for two days.

When operators started calling in sick just to see to their own families' safety, municipal leaders realized emergency management operations needed to be untethered from a brick and mortar facility.

"Technology enables us to operate anywhere but where the hurricane is, and we test this on a daily basis with some people telecommuting from home," said Frank Carmody, deputy director of operations for Houston Administration and Regulatory Affairs. "If you were to call 311, you wouldn't know they weren't right here in the facility."

If Houston is forecasted within a hurricane's forecast cone and there's a 50 percent or greater chance of landfall, the mayor has the option of sending one third of 311 agents to San Antonio. From there, operators can use powerful hotspots to remotely access the city's customer relationship management (CRM) system—Verint Engagement Management.

City Hall is a longtime user of the public sector software, which the Public Works and Solid Waste departments depend on for records. Debris, downed

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trees and flooding can be plotted in Melville, New York-based Verint's system, so the Houston Emergency Center can best allocate resources to handle the calls for service.

The call center has been reinforced, generators placed on the roof and onsite child and pet care arranged. But an air conditioning malfunction could render the building an ineffective shelter in the summer months, and power outages could stop agents from coming to work.

With Dallas about a five-hour drive, San Antonio made the most sense for an alternate base of operations that limited travel time. Houston will attempt to lodge its operators in hotels with convention centers and thus better bandwidth, but because it's impossible to anticipate when those spaces should be reserved, the hotspots enable staff to work out of restaurants or coffee shops if needed.

Carmody came on in 2011, after Ike, when the city transitioned to using Verint as its vendor. The latest CRM, implemented about a year ago, enables Houston to make use of its knowledge base of around 2,600 frequently asked questions both internally and externally.

Agents use the FAQs like Google and can post information on the nearest shelters and evacuations, but users can also use the 311 website to get answers—cutting down on call center wait times.

"Those become force multipliers, when the citizen actually becomes the agent," Carmody said.

Improving such citizen self-service is a priority.

The current Houston 311 app goes through the CRM to the responsible department and has about 15,000 downloads to date, though the city would like to see it used more.

"We're working with Houston to continue to increase mobile data collection," said Steve Carter, Verint key public sector account manager. "We think the right way to do that is with simple applications because some agents may need to manually capture that information if the powers out."

> **"Technology enables us to operate anywhere but where the hurricane is."**
>
> FRANK CARMODY, DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS FOR HOUSTON ADMINISTRATION AND REGULATORY AFFAIRS

When Houston flooded earlier this year, people could use the app to report damage assessments for entire neighborhoods, again limiting the number of 311 calls coming in.

Verint is also considering the role of social media in its work.

"Sometimes people report damage on Twitter," Carter said. "We can easily collect that data, as well as a lot of other options for city planning purposes—whatever channel is convenient and available."

ROUTE FIFTY

A Way to Make Heavy Duty Equipment Sharing Easier Within Big State Agencies

MuniRent was initially founded to help local governments rent machinery to one another. But a pilot program with the Oregon Department of Transportation shows how the model can work in other ways.

BY BILL LUCIA

Alan Mond was walking to a meeting in Ann Arbor, Michigan, with Julien Vanier, when a city truck passed in front of them. It was hauling an excavator, a tracked piece of construction machinery with a bucket on a crane-like arm, which is used for digging holes or trenches.

That's when the idea hit him.

"I looked at my co-founder, Julien, and I said: 'I wonder if the government might have a lot of underutilized equipment," Mond recalled in an interview with *Route Fifty* in early October. At the time, Mond and Vanier—both engineers who did automotive-related work at Bosch—were looking to pin down a solid concept for a startup that involved the sharing economy.

So they began talking to people like city managers and public works directors, asking how government construction machinery was used, and if it was typically owned or rented.

"What we found out is that most municipalities, even tiny municipalities, owned a lot of equipment, and a lot of very expensive equipment, that just sat there," Mond said.

This discovery prompted Mond and Vanier to launch MuniRent.

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Founded last year, MuniRent's initial aim was to help local governments take advantage of idle machinery by enabling them to rent it to neighboring jurisdictions. To do this, Mond and Vanier came up with an online platform that is designed to make this rental process go smoothly.

Available machinery is organized on the system by category—dump trucks, or backhoes for instance. Rental prices and equipment specifications are listed for each machine. Prospective renters log on, and if a piece of equipment is available, they can make a reservation for it.

The company started out working with 23 municipalities in Michigan.

The 'Sweet Spot': Big State Agencies

But in the course of cultivating the start-up, another opportunity emerged, one that Mond believes might have even more promise than government-to-government equipment rentals.

"Someone called us from Oregon DOT," he explained. This was last year.

This person said that Oregon's Department of Transportation had a large amount of machinery stationed throughout the state, and that it was often difficult for the various crews within the agency to track down the equipment they wanted to use, which others crews possessed.

According to Mond, Oregon DOT was looking for "an equipment scheduling, or an equipment sharing platform." In effect, what MuniRent provided.

Rather than renting-out equipment, the state transportation department wanted to use the MuniRent system internally, for crews within the agency.

"That kind of threw us, we weren't expecting that," Mond said.

> **"What we found out is that most municipalities, even tiny municipalities, owned a lot of equipment, and a lot of very expensive equipment, that just sat there."**
>
> ALAN MOND, CO-FOUNDER OF MUNIRENT

But after initiating a two-year pilot program with Oregon last fall, "we realized this is something that is missing."

Since then, other large agencies, including ones dealing with transportation, natural resources and parks have gotten in touch with MuniRent, Mond said. And he believes that by providing a system that can be accessed online, which helps people within an agency find and reserve machinery scattered around at different locations, MuniRent has found a "sweet spot."

How is the platform performing from Oregon DOT's perspective?

"So far, so good," said Carla Phelps, who is the systems administrator for the MuniRent pilot program.

"We had systems in place before MuniRent, which basically meant that neighboring crews would know what they had in their yards." she said. "The biggest benefit from this has been the across-state awareness as to who has what pieces of equipment and when it is available."

"Underutilization is always a concern with the specialty equipment," Phelps added, "because it is such high dollar stuff."

Snow-plowing machinery was one category of equipment where Oregon DOT was looking to increase usage by implementing MuniRent. Because the state had a light winter last year, Phelps said it's hard to know whether the platform was helping achieve that specific goal.

But she did point out that "some of the pieces of equipment that do get used regardless of the season have seen a significant increase in usage."

Two of the most popular machines that get shared on the system are front-end loaders and graders. A grader is typically a three-axle machine with a large blade, which is used to level surfaces such as road beds.

Depending on the size, the cost of a new grader can run between $250,000 to $300,000.

Other items that frequently get shared include dump trucks and large lawnmowers.

"The biggest benefit from this has been the across-state awareness as to who has what pieces of equipment and when it is available."

CARLA PHELPS, SYSTEMS ADMINISTRATOR FOR THE OREGON DOT PILOT PROGRAM

An Estimated $447,993 Saved

Sharing those big-ticket pieces of equipment more often between crews means Oregon DOT has had to rent less machinery.

According to Mond, the agency saved an estimated $447,993 in equipment rental costs between September 2014 and September 2015 using MuniRent.

As for costs, user fees for the MuniRent platform vary based on fleet-size, with plans starting around $6,000 per year.

Mond said he typically advises clients do a pilot program for at least one year.

Oregon paid $10,000, to use the platform for its two-year pilot, according to Mond. But, in an email this week, he stressed that "Since ODOT was our first customer and it was a pilot we gave them a great deal since the product was not finalized. It doesn't really reflect our current pricing."

Within Oregon's transportation department, crews in the bridge, electrical and maintenance divisions are using MuniRent.

Each crew lists only the machinery that they want to share, and can deny any requests. Crews can also specify if they want to only lend gear out nearby to where they are based, and they can insist that highly specialized machines be accompanied by one of their own operators.

"It is extremely user friendly," Phelps said. "For the most part I've done very little training."

Right now, budget dollars are not transferred between divisions or crews within Oregon DOT when equipment is borrowed. As for getting the equipment back in the same condition it went out in, Phelps said that verbal agreements are commonly made that "if you wreck it, you fix it."

MuniRent was selected last July to be part of the 2014 Code for America Accelerator program.

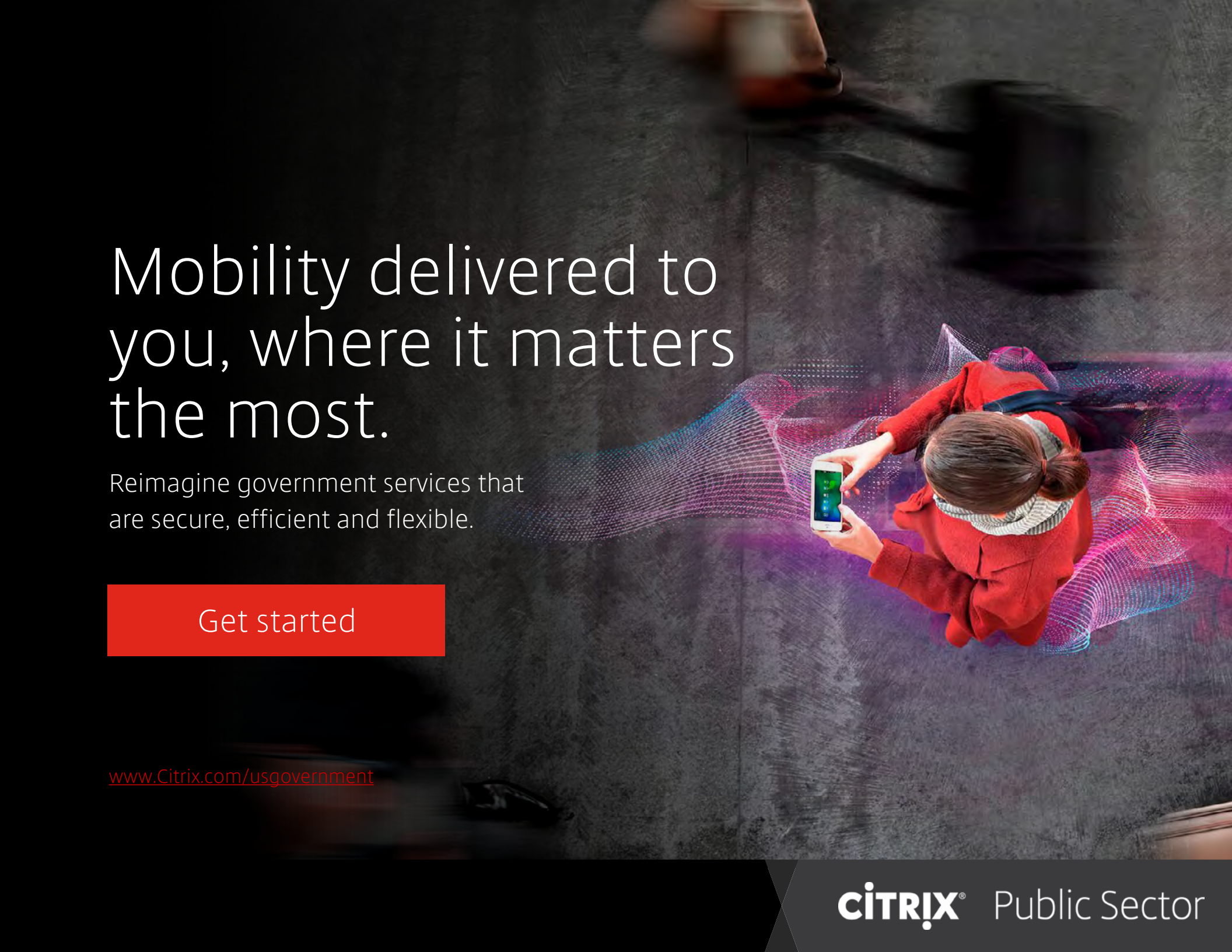
The four-month program provides startups $25,000 of funding, along with mentorship, training, and ways to connect with investors and government officials. MuniRent was one of five companies selected from 112 Accelerator program applicants.

As of early October, Mond said the company was in the contracting phase with four other large agencies and that between 10 and 15 others were "waiting in line."

At the local government level, Mond said MuniRent is working on a "large project" to grow the number of municipal clients the company has in Michigan by a "big factor."

From Phelps' perspective, there's value in what MuniRent is trying to help agencies accomplish.

"Some of the big pieces sit an awful lot," she said. "Anything we can look at to get our dollars-worth out of them, the better."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ROUTE FIFTY

This County Convinced All Its Localities to Go Paperless

Shared services grants are going a long way in Tompkins County, New York.

BY DAVE NYCZEPIR

Tompkins County, New York, began digitizing land and court records dating back to 1817 a decade ago, with grants funding most of what blossomed into a shared service across all its local jurisdictions.

When County Clerk Maureen Reynolds was placed in charge of a records center—an old library with a leaky roof and a boiler set to blow—she initially planned on barcoding boxes and tracking only what her office wanted.

But the major caveat of her task was that she was told not to expect additional staff or money to handle the workload, so she went to a conference to explore alternatives and caught a Laserfiche demo.

"The public always says government is hiding stuff," Reynolds told *Route Fifty* in a November interview. "Well, we're not. We just can't find it."

Before the enterprise content management system was adopted, the county's payroll liaison had to take down all public records requests before getting down on her hands and knees with a flashlight to search boxes.

With Laserfiche, 200 years of meeting minutes can be scanned in seconds—all 9,000 boxes getting imaged in two years. Laserfiche's optical character recognition was the selling point for the county, Reynolds said.

She estimates the county saved between $2.8 and $5.5 million not having to renovate the records center it instead sold to be demolished to build apartments. No longer needing storage space and with an imaging center in the county seat of Ithaca, a network in place and institutional knowledge of the system and indexing, the county turned its attention to consolidating services.

"The county already had the tools and could save smaller municipalities, which didn't have budgets to sustain records projects, a lot of money," Julie Conley

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Holcomb, Ithaca's city clerk, said in an interview. "They've done a great job increasing server capacity to digitize more records, so we can make them available to the public and internally."

Initially, six cities entered into joint partnerships with county, which provides the server and additional software licenses.

Reynolds, who's been writing grants for 23 of her 27 years as clerk, was able to secure New York State Archives Local Government Records Management Improvement Fund (LGRMIF) shared services grants to finance the first and subsequent phases of the consolidation effort. About $150 million is available, collected from taxes on county clerk mortgage filings, through a competitive grant application process for pushing shared services.

> **"The public always says government is hiding stuff. Well, we're not. We just can't find it."**
>
> MAUREEN REYNOLDS, TOMPKINS COUNTY CLERK

Some small towns and villages in the county lacked IT support entirely and backed up records on thumb drives. Flooding caused by Hurricane Sandy in October 2012 led to the loss of hard copies in others.

Such places were the easiest to onboard, though Reynolds was surprised to find the county met no pushback.

"Sometimes people overthink a project, and it's more just about getting out and talking to other governments," she said. "We're all doing the same thing. We all want to do it well. We all want to save taxpayer money."

Ithaca, expected to be a holdout, was one of two municipalities in the county that already had Laserfiche, but it was underutilizing an older version and recognized the huge cost savings.

The Ithaca Police Department had no more room for felony case files, with its 25-year retention period, before the county stepped in.

Two valuable hand-drawn maps from 1893 and 1899 were recently scanned into the system by a private consultant, so they can be preserved from degrading.

Territorial records disputes are nonexistent because the county can't access cities' secure repositories, and municipalities remain in charge of their records decisions. While the county generally destroys all paper after scanning documents, cities can keep the hard copies if they so desire.

The final step of the process was digitizing every county jurisdictions' municipal court records.

Tompkins County can even host the records of outside jurisdictions, exporting the images and data back to them.

The county presented at the New York Department of State's Local Government Innovation Summit in November.

"Given the state budget and declining resources, I don't think anybody had any resistance or questioned that this was the right thing to do," Holcomb said.

ROUTE FIFTY

About the Authors

MICHAEL GRASS

Michael Grass is Executive Editor of *Government Executive's Route Fifty*. He's the founding co-editor of *DCist*.com and previously served as Deputy Managing Editor at *Washington City Paper*, Deputy Managing Editor at *The New York Observer's Politicker*, edited Maryland, Virginia and District of Columbia news for *The Huffington Post*, and worked as a Copy Editor at *Roll Call* newspaper on Capitol Hill.

BILL LUCIA

Bill Lucia is a Reporter with *Government Executive's Route Fifty*. He previously worked at *Inside U.S. Trade* and covered Seattle City Hall and Washington state policy for *Crosscut.com*. He is a graduate of New York University and holds a master's in public administration from the Evans School of Public Policy and Governance at the University of Washington.

DAVE NYCZEPIR

Dave Nyczepir is a News Editor for *Government Executive's Route Fifty*. He previously covered breaking news and local government for *The Desert Sun* newspaper in Southern California's Coachella Valley and worked for *Campaigns & Elections* magazine. He is a graduate of the College of William and Mary and holds a master's in journalism from the Merrill College of Journalism at the University of Maryland.