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Denver City Hall Takes a Page From NASA.

Mayor Mike Johnston has used “tiger teams” to tackle sticky problems like barriers to housing construction.

Takeaways

- In 1970, NASA’s Apollo 13 mission was saved by a “tiger team” of experts who devised makeshift strategies to preserve oxygen, water, and electricity for the astronauts.
- Denver Mayor Mike Johnston is using the tiger team approach to tackle city challenges, including processing construction permits and addressing street homelessness, with significant successes in both areas.
- The tiger team model, which involves assembling cross-disciplinary teams to tackle high-priority problems, is being recommended by Bloomberg Philanthropies as a key tool for local officials to drive innovation and solve complex urban challenges.

“Houston, we have a problem.” Those five words, transmitted from space after an on-board explosion 55 hours into NASA’s 1970 Apollo 13 mission, echoed around the world, captivating more than 40 million Americans who watched on TV as the three orbiting astronauts accomplished the seemingly impossible: safely returning to Earth.

What most people didn’t realize at the time was that the on-the-ground crew was well-suited for the crisis. Every step that ensured the astronauts’ safety was guided by a small, cross-disciplinary unit of NASA experts — eventually dubbed a “tiger team” — that was quickly assembled to devise makeshift strategies and engineering workarounds to preserve enough oxygen, water and electricity to save the imperiled trio in the damaged capsule.

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Bloomberg CityLab

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