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IBM Designates 16 Places for SmartCity Projects.

Whatever the politics or geography, it's a safe assumption that most mayors love innovation. What's not assured, however, is the funding and resources to implement it.

Acting on this holdback and to develop the market in government data solutions, IBM has stepped in to offer aid through its Smarter Cities Challenge, an initiative to volunteer its expertise to 16 cities and counties around the world. As in previous years, the objective will be to provide solutions to civic challenges such as clean water, healthy food, revenue generation, job creation, efficient transportation and other issues.

The four areas selected in the U.S. for the Challenge were Dallas, Baton Rouge, La.; Birmingham, Ala.; and Suffolk County, N.Y.

Outside the U.S., cities included Abuja, Nigeria; Ballarat, Australia; Brussels, Belgium; Dublin, Ireland; Durban, South Africa; Jinan, China; Mombasa County, Kenya; Niigata, Japan; Perth, Australia; Tainan, Taiwan; Vilnius, Lithuania and Zapopan, Mexico.

This year will mark the fourth iteration of the competitive grant program and will mobilize IBM teams to the winning jurisdictions across the globe. Pro bono work includes consultation, months of issue-centered research, collaborative outreach and comprehensive recommendations to solve or improve problems facing regions and cities.

Speaking for Suffolk County, Justin Meyers, the assistant deputy county executive, said Suffolk is eager to enlist IBM's expertise against its challenge of a widespread water contamination from unsewered homes.

In Suffolk, Meyers said the county has about 360,000 homes, or 70 percent, without sewage connections that have been connected to Nitrogen ground and water contamination. The impact has resulted in a high cost sanitation effort, and for drinking water, major losses of wildlife and inadvertently causing the region to be susceptible to raging waterfronts that have no sea vegetation to slow it down.

"We got slammed by Superstorm Sandy and we're susceptible to any storm that comes up along the East Coast," Meyers said. "We looked at the IBM's Smarter Cities Challenge as an opportunity to partner with a private sector company that may have resources and abilities that we might not necessarily have."

Meyers said his team will be waiting for IBM's team of consultants with current research and open access to county land and water data.

"IBM offers us an opportunity to expand on that and continue to hone our decision-making in the smartest way possible," he said. "Public-private partnerships are always important. Any opportunity that a government entity has, especially one such as this is a win-win."

Meryers also credited County Executive Steven Bellone for pursuing the IBM's support and other answers to the Nitrogen problem, which has daunted others in the past due to the sheer size of the costs, estimated to in the billions in terms of infrastructure.

"We're very excited to have won this," he said.

Jennifer Crozier, the vice president of the IBM's global citizenship initiatives, said the program has helped 100 jurisdictions since it began — every team effort valued at roughly \$500,000 for each jurisdiction. Crozier said her teams at IBM recognize it's hard work to navigate the politics of local governments and want to help grant recipients with ideas that will bring community projects to life.

A significant challenge she said IBM observes is that municipalities struggle to making sense of data. Cities and regions often already have the raw information that measures community trends and needs, Crozier said; the difficulty lies in sharing this information among different agencies and interpreting information to make it actionable.

IBM hopes to realize tangible projects that offer big gains. As with past projects, Crozier said she'd like to take buzz words like big data, mobile, social and cloud technology and turn them into practical solutions for citizens and officials.

In a look back, the initiative is known for a wide range of urban improvements. In Syracuse, N.Y., IBM created a land bank for the city that enabled it to reclaim and work with the private sector to revitalize vacant properties. In Providence, R.I., it simplified and shortened the process of permit and construction plan applications. In the agricultural city of Date, Japan, IBM helped officials publish food safety information for consumers after Fukushima's tragic earthquake and nuclear reactor leak that contaminated much of the country's lands.

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