

CAPSTONE CHALLENGE SERIES 2023:

Public-Private Partnerships Powering Cities



About the National League of Cities

The National League of Cities (NLC) is the voice of America's cities, towns and villages, representing more than 200 million people. NLC works to strengthen local leadership, influence federal policy and drive innovative solutions.

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Introduction

OCAL leaders know that progress and problem-solving require collaboration. Historic federal investments through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), and Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) have made it more important than ever to leverage the expertise, resources, and innovation of the private and public sectors to build a better future.

That's why NLC created the Capstone Challenge Series, a program that brings together NLC member cities and strategic partners to create solutions to the real needs of municipalities. Through this program, groups of cities and private sector partners work together on a variety of projects over the course of eight months. For example, in this year's cohort, Accela worked with Louisville, KY to create a foreclosure registration and tracker, and mySidewalk partnered with Tampa, FL and Brighton, CO to provide data needed to apply to federal grants. This is the second year of the project. For more detail about the structure of the program, see the 2021 report here. This report dives into the details of each project. NLC member cities are invited to explore the case studies developed through the program and consider opportunities and examples of public-private partnerships.

Program Goals

The central goal of the Capstone Challenge Series is to bring together the expertise and resources of the private and public sectors to create a better future for our cities, towns and villages. This goal is broken down into three sub-goals:

- Create meaningful dialogue and authentic, long-term engagement between partners and members, bringing mutual value to both groups.
- Provide technical assistance and support to NLC members through pro bono services from partners; extend support to non-participant members by sharing resources, case studies, and best practices developed in the program.
- Add to the existing literature about municipal cross-sector collaboration and share learnings with NLC's broader audience.

Project and Participant Snapshots



6 strategic partners



9 municipalities representing

8 states

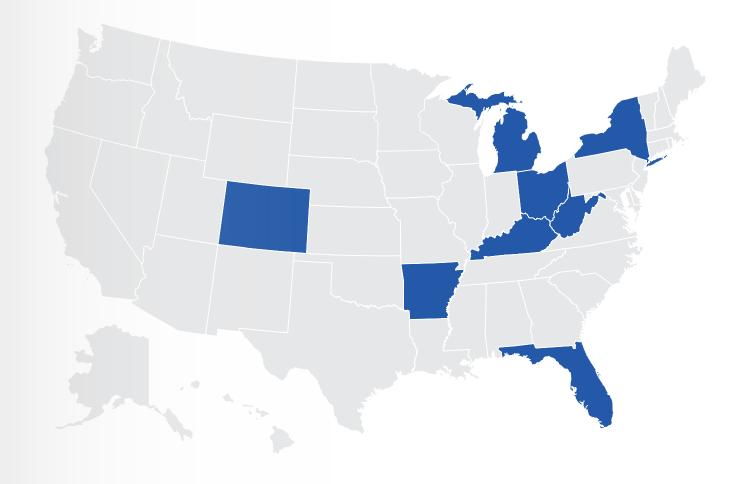
2.385.034 residents



Among those 8 municipalities

4 are small cities, 1 is a mid-size city, 4 are large cities;

2 are state capital cities



Project snapshots:

Accela partnered with Louisville, KY, to create an online Foreclosure Registry to capture and maintain foreclosure data, such as current property owner, maintenance company, inspection history, property condition, occupancy status, and information about the property's foreclosure status.





mySidewalk partnered with Brighton, CO and Tampa, FL to co-design and deploy a user-friendly, repeatable process for using community data to support grant-seeking.







Bitwise Industries worked with Dearborn, MI to build an artificial intelligencepowered SMS texting system customized to answer inquiries and send links to resources about Dearborn city services.





Axon worked with Little Rock, AR and Columbus, OH to educate the community about law enforcement technology, strengthening the relationships between police departments and the communities they serve and creating a safer and healthier community and public safety culture.







Pallet's Advisory Services team worked with local leaders and community experts in Huntington, WV and Northglenn, CO to advance tailored solutions to homelessness.







Esri worked with Jamestown, NY leveraged the Neighborhood Stabilization Solution to perform property surveys, track blight, and engage with citizens about community cohesion, reducing the economic development and quality of life impacts of substandard housing.

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Project Highlights HE following section details the goals, processes, and outcomes for the projects that were part of the 2022 Capstone Challenge Series.

Housing Crisis at the Forefront: Foreclosure Registry Informs Policy & Action

City Name

Louisville, KY

Partner name

Accela

Background

Many U.S. cities struggle to ensure housing access. Insufficient housing stock constrains economic growth and limits opportunities for residents. Local governments can take actions to address these challenges, including managing vacant and foreclosed properties. Foreclosed properties which are also vacant or abandoned can harm a community's health, safety, economic value, and character if not properly maintained. Because the foreclosure process can take years to complete, having clarity as to a property's stage in this path can help governments curb these negative impacts and more efficiently target public maintenance services. For Louisville, KY, with a housing deficit of 30,000 units, ensuring that properties are brought back to productive occupancy and rejoin the tax base quickly is in everyone's best interest.

Problem

Foreclosures are filed in the court system, outside the Office of Community Development's purview. The Office needs to be able to efficiently track and monitor foreclosed properties in its jurisdiction in order to have a primary contact when maintenance or blight issues arise.



Code Enforcement is sending notices to the property owner of record. If it's vacant or only occupied by tenants or owned by a creditor, that information is unlikely to get to the right people."

Tia Bowman, Real Estate Program Supervisor.

Because the foreclosure process can take up to one or more years, the City will take on basic maintenance costs, if necessary, to ensure the property does not fall into disrepair, such as mowing or boarding up windows. Once the property's ownership changes, it's also important to make sure the deed is recorded under the new owner. Otherwise, prior owners can be haunted by "zombie fines" for issues at properties they no longer own.

Solution

The Louisville Metro Government decided to establish itself as a more active and critical stakeholder in the foreclosure process. The Office of Housing and Community Development and the Department of Codes and Regulations partnered with Accela to create a Foreclosure Registry to intake and manage important information and processes concerning property foreclosures.

Using Accela's Citizen Access web portal, the creditor or bank which has issued the foreclosure enters required information about occupants, inspections, and property condition, as well as their contact information and the contact information of any property management companies who will be maintaining the property.

The registration then flows into Louisville's internal Accela system, where it is reviewed by Real Estate Program staff, and a series of automated processes take over. The Accela system generates notifications back to the registrant about the status of their registration (both at the start and throughout its time on the Registry), and simultaneously scans open Property Maintenance cases in the Office of Code Enforcement using the parcel number. Matches with active cases will automatically alert the Code Enforcement team, providing them with updated property and contact information. Similarly, the Code Enforcement

team will be updated once the property is placed under new ownership after the foreclosure process is completed. The Registry also serves as a repository against which the Code Enforcement system will be automatically checked when maintenance complaints come in. A number of helpful new reports and dashboards keep unexpected surprises at bay by displaying important registry and enforcement case information summaries at a glance to department leadership.

Outcome

With the new Foreclosure Registry, Louisville joins other large metropolitan governments who have taken this important step toward proactive property maintenance. The Louisville Foreclosure Registry helps both the Office of Community Development and the Code Enforcement teams focus their resources more efficiently by identifying which properties are truly vacant and need City-provided maintenance. With over 11,000 work orders performed annually on vacant or abandoned properties, this data-driven ability to be targeted and proactive with maintenance services can conserve City resources while ensuring that properties don't damage community character while in foreclosure. The Registry also captures the number of people who are in the property and may be affected by the foreclosure. Having this data on hand will be used to support new social services, serve as evidence for funding needs, or provide information requested by governing authorities. As every registration must be renewed annually, Department staff will be able to track properties as they move through the foreclosure process, all the way through to property sale and deed recordation with new ownership.



Data Storytelling to Help Small and Mid-sized Cities Compete for Federal Grants

City Names

Brighton, CO and Tampa, FL

Partner Name

mySidewalk

Background

Billions of dollars in federal funding through ARPA, IIJA, and IRA are newly available, fueling hope in many cities that they can finally implement critical community projects.

However, most small and mid-sized cities lack the dedicated staff and access to data resources typically available in large cities to apply for these funds, putting them at a disadvantage when competing for the same pool of funds.

Problem

A significant barrier to competing for federal funds in smaller cities is the work it takes to acquire, prepare, analyze, and present data — a requirement for telling compelling, data-supported stories about communities that will benefit most from investment. This type of data storytelling is critical to producing a competitive application.

In recent years, the City of Tampa, FL, has taken steps to alleviate this burden by creating a Grants Office and hiring full-time grant writers. Building on their initial success, they're continuing to seek new ways to equip people and teams to tell data stories that secure further funding.

The City of Brighton, CO, is in the early stages of centralizing resources for its grant activities. A historically rural community outside Denver, Brighton has doubled in size over the last 20 years. It's become one of the fastest-growing mid-sized cities in the Front Range, but the pace of growth has forced city officials to rely more on grant funding to meet ever-growing infrastructure, safety, and other needs. A scattered and tedious data process stands in the way, which often looks like each department pulling their data from different places, inconsistent use of data across teams, and costly redundancy in timeconsuming, tedious data wrangling.

Solution

mySidewalk partnered with teams at Tampa and Brighton to create a repeatable process and data tool to support a grants workflow. They started with a focus on a single grant opportunity - the DOT's Reconnecting Communities Pilot (RCP) program - as a proof of concept that could scale to support additional grants sought by new teams.

The first step was to curate a set of indicators from mySidewalk's data library that were highly relevant to the DOT's scoring criteria, which - like many current federal grant opportunities - focused on issues of equity, environmental justice, mobility, and community connectivity. Because mySidewalk builds its library specifically for people working on community-scale challenges, each city was presented with a robust set of indicators - including less familiar and newer ones - to find the best fit for their projects.

Further, because mySidewalk has processed the data so that it's available for hundreds of thousands of geographies, the teams could easily see and select indicators that could describe a project's specific impact area, which typically has custom non-Census-designated boundaries. This feature allowed the cities to understand better and represent the communities that would benefit most from investment.

Selected indicators were visualized in a user-friendly, interactive, and ADA-compliant tool that included access to the raw data and exportable visualizations for easy inclusion in official grant applications. By providing grant writers with digestible, grant-relevant information at their fingertips, the tool saved them hours of data wrangling so they could focus on interpretation, analysis, and storytelling to make their application stand out.

Outcome

Both cities used the data tool to apply for the Reconnecting Communities Pilot by crafting a data-supported narrative that identified, described, and demonstrated the need within their project's unique impact area.

For the City of Brighton, in particular, this process and tool reduced a data collection exercise that would have taken four weeks to just a third of that time, and they were able to use previously unfamiliar indicators that had critical relevance to their project. Additionally, they discovered the tool was immediately valuable for other departments working on additional grants.

Both cities are awaiting word on grant awards, and mySidewalk is continuing to work with Brighton to apply learnings from the pilot as we onboard a new group to the tool. As a designated "data champion" for their department, each group member will work on integrating community data into their workflows for new grants and other projects.



Equitable Access to City Services Through AI-Driven SMS Messaging

City Name

Dearborn, MI

Partner Name Bitwise Industries

Background

In 2022, the incoming Mayoral Administration in Dearborn, Michigan, prioritized earning residents' confidence, addressing equity gaps, and providing peoplecentered service. City leadership recognized that some city assets (such as a call center open only from 8am to 5pm Monday through Friday) could be difficult to navigate and could hamper effective communications with constituents and thereby hurt trust in government. To achieve its goal of providing excellent service to all, the Administration sought cutting-edge technology to improve and strengthen connections with the city's constituents, regardless of residents' digital capacity or language preference.

Problem

The city of Dearborn has young and multilingual populations who have been affected by economic challenges and resource limitations. Some residents have been hesitant to seek help from the city's call center due to uncertainty about agents' linguistic abilities. Others have not been able to access or navigate the material available on the city's website. Limited municipal staff capacity also slows responsiveness to constituent requests. For example, City Hall receives a high and steady volume of calls seeking information about and help with Water Department services that it cannot immediately provide. Residents report struggling to find the correct contact information for the Department, which is itself slow to respond because it relies solely on an insufficient number of human operators. With this in mind. Dearborn's leadership sought an effective solution that met the needs of its constituents, enabled efficient service delivery, and provided access to services at all times, including when the call center is closed outside business hours.

Solution

Bitwise Industries worked with Dearborn staff to create an Al-driven SMS messaging system to provide residents with access to Dearborn's city services in multiple languages that are spoken within the city. A customized AI engine processes incoming messages, uses key phrases to find and summarize responsive answers and contact information from Dearborn's website, and translates, as necessary, the response into the language used in the incoming message. This system was tested in a real-world user environment, and its Al engine improves its performance by requesting and analyzing SMS-based feedback. It was developed by a diverse, multidisciplinary team with native linguistic skills and experience in immigrant and underserved communities.

Outcome

User testing showed that the Al-driven SMS messaging system was well received, and implementation with public promotion is likely to increase equitable access to government services. Its use can give the city access to statistical and qualitative data about residents' interests, which will help the city better align its investments to meet the needs of its constituents. The testing process made clear a need for additional published information about topics of frequent inquiry, such as rules for disposal of potentially hazardous materials and hours and cost of public amenities like pools. Dearborn gained critical insight to guide its updating of digital assets, and while website revisions that are a necessary precursor to full adoption of this SMS system proceed, the city may opt to make the SMS messaging service available with limited capacity, with costs held below the threshold at which an extended procurement process would be required.



Co-Creating Public SafetyWith Communities

City Names

Little Rock, AR and Columbus, OH

Partner Name

Axon

Background

Technology has become an essential element of the public safety ecosystem. However, tech companies have traditionally prioritized informing city and police leadership over informing the public about the technology that is available to meet complex public safety needs. Axon recognizes that community members also need the same access to education and engagement to create a safer and healthier community.

Problem

Communities are increasingly concerned about rising crime rates and trust, transparency, and accountability within their police departments. Despite these concerns, they have often been left out of the education process when their city considers new technology for public safety. Decisions about what technology a community needs requires a collaborative approach that is informative and inclusive. To meet this important goal, tech companies like Axon must close the tech education gap by providing detailed information about the technology being used or considered in their community. Likewise, communities need the opportunity to discuss this technology and raise any questions or concerns with pertinent stakeholders. The result is an equitable, informed decision-making process. This co-creation model serves the dual purpose of strengthening the relationships between police departments and the communities they serve and creating a safer and healthier community and public safety culture.

Solution

Axon partnered with the cities of Columbus and Little Rock to host "Share the Table" programming, which focused on educating the public about the technology products that the police department uses. In Columbus, they cohosted two events to educate residents on the Body Worn Camera program the city recently adopted. In Little Rock, they did a briefing with community leaders on their existing TASER CEW Devices. Axon's vision was to develop creative, safe, and inclusive spaces, educate the community about their technology, and receive community feedback.

To accomplish these goals, they:

◆ Hosted four events - two in Columbus, OH and two in Little Rock, AR. In Columbus, they hosted two at-large events, and in Little Rock, they introduced the program to their Civilian Review Board, Hope Council, and a diverse board of community leaders. They followed up with an at-large event.

- ◆ Provided transparency and communication to communities on public safety technology used by their local public safety agencies. Axon provided an in-depth presentation on the technology, its components, features, and use cases. They co-facilitated discussions with the local public safety agencies and other city officials about the need for strong policies and procedures, fielded questions from the group, took notes, and provided a digital and paper survey. They cultivated interactive and inclusive spaces for these discussions. They concluded these events with an after-action report that summarized the event, community recommendations, questions and answers, and any notable next steps.
- ◆ Engaged historically underrepresented groups in the co-creation of public safety through intentional participant recruitment. Axon wanted to assure that communities who may not have a strong relationship with the police were present to create an equitable space that was rich with a diversity of voices. Columbus and Little Rock invited residents who have engaged with the city through events, protests, and public safety complaints. Axon and other partners supported the cities' efforts by engaging community organizers they had previously worked with to attend and consult on making the event feel comfortable. These measures drove diverse attendance and engaged new residents.
- ◆ Utilized a trauma-informed approach to the facilitation by having a mental health professional at each event. As Axon began planning, they realized that the major problem they were solving for is how to safely hold spaces to have challenging conversations with communities that may have negative perceptions of or experiences with the police. They leaned into difficult conversations and were encouraged by the patience and honesty of all participants. These were the objectives of the trauma-informed facilitation:
 - Hold space- Provide a supportive and trauma-informed experience that is free of judgment.
 - **Inclusive** They made sure that they considered diversity of thought, ethnicity, gender, ability, and socio-economic status, among others.
 - ◆ Accessible- Both in terms of proximity to the communities they wanted to reach as well as to community members with different abilities.

- ◆ **Communal-** They "shared the table" literally with food and refreshments and figuratively in terms of the collective of diverse stakeholders.
- Familiar- They chose local spaces, ate local food, and incorporated small businesses.
- Created multiple opportunities to collect feedback. Axon created an interactive board for people to write out their thoughts and feedback during the event, took concise notes during Q&A, provided pre- and post-surveys, and conducted post-event follow-ups with community leaders.
- Collaborated with our city partners to select small businesses as vendors for the events to reinvest in partner communities. For example, a local Blackowned business catered and hosted one of the Columbus events.

Outcome

Axon's project was an exercise in re-imagining public safety by including community priorities in the adoption of new technology. They learned a tremendous amount about what communities need to feel heard and safe in this space. They also learned that communities hope that events like this project will become a standardized process as cities consider even more public safety technologies in the years to come.

Some key community insights from the engagements:

- All attendees agreed that there needs to be more opportunity for dialogue between the city, the community, and the police when considering new technologies for public safety.
- Community members would like to work more with their cities and police departments around matters of public safety.
- Although some community members found the subject matter challenging because of a lack of trust, the majority of attendees felt safe and comfortable in the space, that included both policing personnel and city officials.
- ◆ All attendees agreed that they would attend future events if offered. They also shared that they felt like these types of tangible events were necessary for the city and the police department to share information with community members.

- All attendees walked away learning more about the product discussed, with support and buy-in for the use of the product in their community. There were residents and agencies who communicated recommendations for these events and technology moving forward. They will foster a deeper relationship with our product teams. Residents also left a set of recommendations for the agencies and cities on policies and accessibility that we will continue to support.
- There were a number of attendees who were not aware of the mission behind the products and had a sparked interest in pursuing a career in public safety tech.
- Interestingly, most attendees had never attended a public safety event with the city or the police department prior to Axon's project. In Little Rock, their Hope Council and Civilian Review board agreed that this should be expanded for other members of the community.

This project helped city leaders and police departments consider the importance of prioritizing community voice in the tech adoption process. Providing communities with proximity to the decision-making process around public safety technology adoption is vital to the health of the relationship between the community, the police, and partners.



Addressing Homelessness Through Holistic Plans and **Innovative Programs**

City Names

Huntington, WV and Northglenn, CO

Partner Name

Pallet Shelter

Background

Homelessness is a pervasive and growing problem in America. In 2020, <u>582,462</u> people experienced homelessness, according to the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. From 2015 to 2020, the number of unsheltered people surged by 30%.

Local governments are on the frontlines of tackling homelessness but are overwhelmed by how to address challenges. Compounding factors, including limited funding, lack of staff capacity, and daunting political and regulatory barriers exacerbate the problem further.

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Cities need support identifying and implementing holistic solutions to homelessness that will make an immediate and lasting impact.

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Problem

The City of Huntington, WV, has been acutely impacted by the opioid epidemic, low quality and declining rental stock, deindustrialization, and insufficient funding for homeless programs.

Huntington has a strong Continuum of Care (CoC) and public health institutions but no full-time staff dedicated to homelessness. Huntington and Cabell County recently sued drug companies for their role in catalyzing the opioid epidemic - resulting in overdoses and deaths - which experts believe is fueling the escalation of homelessness locally.

Huntington lacks the infrastructure needed to support homeless individuals experiencing mental health crises or those at risk to themselves or others.

Northglenn is a landlocked city located in Adams County. According to U.S. Census figures in 2020, 54% of renters in Adams County were cost-burdened and vulnerable to becoming homeless. Northglenn strives to promote regional homelessness plans but has struggled to secure buy-in, funding, and support from regional partners. Northglenn urgently needs more emergency shelters to meet current demand.

Solution

Northglenn, CO, and the City of Huntington, WV, to address homelessness with holistic strategies backed by data and best practices.

In collaboration with city staff, Pallet and city leaders explored programs and identified gaps and potential improvements in social services, emergency shelter, and permanent housing strategies, as well as policies, regulatory changes, and funding sources to end homelessness.

Pallet's Advisory Service team did a robust community needs assessment in both cities, talking to dozens of community and city leaders and experts to inform our plans and strategies.

Over the course of the NLC Capstone Challenge, Pallet's Advisory Services team:

- Conducted over 25 informational interviews with city and community leaders
- ◆ Held weekly meetings for 8 months with both cities to continuously track progress
- Facilitated 10 planning meetings with internal and external stakeholders
- Completed six unique deliverables outlining step-by-step instructions and recommendations to shape cities' priorities and plans
- Presented to three decision-making bodies
- Attended numerous Continuum of Care (CoC) meetings, regional planning meetings, and webinars and met with potential service providers to learn more about local efforts

These efforts were key to inform our strategies and facilitate the development of new programs addressing homelessness in Northglenn and Huntington.

THE CITY OF HUNTINGTON, WEST VIRGINIA

In Huntington, Pallet's community needs assessment resulted in seven primary recommendations for how the city should address some of its most urgent challenges, including homelessness, substance misuse, and housing. From there, Pallet supported the implementation of one of our top recommendations.

Partnering with public health and law enforcement leaders, Huntington is launching a Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) to handle active mental health crises for people experiencing homelessness and/or substance use disorder (SUD). The CIT - a mobile unit with trained mental health and Huntington Police Department professionals - is equipped to de-escalate, provide mental health assessments, and offer critical services and referrals. Given current trends and data, we estimate that over 85% of individuals engaged by the CIT will be experiencing SUD, homelessness, or both circumstances.

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THE CITY OF NORTHGLENN, COLORADO

Pallet did a comprehensive analysis of the current service and program landscape for homelessness in Northglenn and Adams County, identified recommendations for improvement, and provided local leaders with a step-by-step implementation plan to provide more emergency shelter solutions.

To support the City of Northglenn, Pallet developed our "Report on Homelessness in Northglenn, Colorado: Solutions, Strategies, and Interim Shelter Bed Implementation Guide." The plan includes step-by-step instructions for how to develop more emergency shelters, including specific locations, service providers, and budgets needed to bring projects into fruition.

In February 2023, Pallet's Advisory Services plans were presented to the Adams County Board of County Commissioners, the Northglenn City Council, and a regional body of City Managers working to end homelessness. Our efforts have informed broader homelessness priorities and demonstrated the need for more emergency shelter as a primary recommendation.

Outcome

As a result of this work, Northglenn expects to partner with Adams County and neighboring cities to advance specific plans for an emergency shelter program in the region. With concrete plans underway, Northglenn aims to develop programs that provide wraparound services to people experiencing homelessness and help stabilize and transition residents into permanent housing.

In Huntington, the CIT program will launch in March of 2023. This program is an essential first step to aid the most vulnerable people experiencing homelessness. Longer term, Pallet's recommendations support Huntington in developing comprehensive plans to provide more shelter, permanent housing, and holistic strategies to end homelessness.



Leveraging Knowledge of Property Conditions for Neighborhood Advancement

City Name

Jamestown, NY

Partner Name

Esri

Background

In contrast to the national narrative surrounding a housing shortage crisis, Jamestown, New York has a surplus of housing. This surplus is a result of several external forces that have influenced decision-making and created opportunities for bad actors. It is also represented in a renter-heavy distribution that contributes a respective but related challenge to the city. Jamestown is actively filling its toolbox with strategies to gain a clear understanding of the scope of its housing stock.

Problem

The city understands that the excess of Jamestown's surplus housing - which includes foreclosed and abandoned properties - is substandard respective to safety, cleanliness, and appeal, but they lack an understanding of Jamestown's housing stock in its entirety, however, well-maintained or neglected. Without a data-driven catalogue of the presentation and perceptions of the city's homes, the city is ill-equipped to make informed decisions to address a home's challenges and projections to create and implement preventative measures for a deteriorating or abandoned property.

Solution

Esri is leveraging the Neighborhood Stabilization Solution components, the Property Condition Survey, a Blight Status Dashboard, and an ArcGIS HUB landing page to deliver a set of capabilities for Jamestown. Esri manages the input of data, and the GIS Administrator at the City of Jamestown will manage the output. The end product will allow Jamestown to conduct desktop property surveys, measure the fragility of neighborhoods, track blight, and publish a focused group of information products for citizens in the community.

Outcome

Early in 2023, the city staff will be able to perform property condition assessment surveys from photo arrays, grade property conditions as viewed, display neighborhood statistics on building conditions in a dashboard for tracking purposes, and inform residents and get feedback on this initiative. The city plans to use the data to make more and better-informed decisions, employ the tools they already have more effectively, and craft relevant policies to address the findings.

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Addressing Homelessness Through Holistic Plans and Innovative Programs

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