

# Initiative brings Arizona cities and towns together to tackle shared challenges

## ASU-convened Collaborative Cities Initiative creates forum for knowledge sharing, problem-solving

By Ayrel Clark-Proffitt, ASU News  
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Municipalities are inundated with data. Police and fire department activity, water usage, development permits, traffic incidents, pavement conditions and resident service requests generate a steady stream of information every day.

The challenge is determining how to put that data to its best use to improve residents' lives.

Used effectively, the information can help governments move from understanding the past to anticipating what may happen next — and applying those insights to improve services. Subject-matter experts, policy analysts, data professionals and, potentially, artificial intelligence can help transform data into action.

It is more important than ever for government data and policy professionals across jurisdictions to have a forum where they can convene, share best practices and learn from one another, said Jeff Tyne, executive director of the [Center for Local Government Education and Innovation](#) in Arizona State University's [School of Public Affairs](#). That's where the Collaborative Cities Initiative comes in.

The newly launched initiative gives city administrators a place to exchange policy ideas and practical approaches intended to help elected officials make informed decisions. It is a reimagined successor to [Valley Benchmark Communities](#), creating an ongoing opportunity for collaboration, knowledge sharing and problem-solving between Arizona municipalities.

CCI is open to all 92 towns and cities in Arizona, a significant expansion from Valley Benchmark Communities, which only served cities in metropolitan Phoenix. Tyne hopes county governments will also participate as the initiative grows because many of the challenges cities face transcend jurisdictional boundaries. Eventually, he would like to see state agencies engage with CCI in a leadership and data-sharing capacity.

ASU alumna Jenna Goad ('05), strategic planning and organizational performance manager at the city of Goodyear, is a board member for the Arizona City/County Management Association, a key partner in the initiative. She sees CCI as a valuable setting for Arizona communities to learn from each other and connect with ASU experts.

"CCI will be beneficial for all communities, especially small and rural communities that often lack the resources to attend conferences or have highly specialized staff," she said. "Likewise, smaller jurisdictions can provide great examples of operating efficiently and having close ties to the community. Learning from each other will help us all address common challenges and better serve our residents, businesses and other stakeholders."

Goad said her priorities for engaging with CCI center on data. Local governments can use data to improve service delivery and inform decisions by department leaders, managers and elected officials, Goad said. Goodyear, for example, is using real-time information on spikes in water use to notify residents quickly about potential leaks. It is also developing a Road Safety Action Plan that uses historical crash data to prioritize areas for infrastructure investment or enhanced enforcement.

CCI provides a space to share Goodyear's successes and learn what is working in other municipalities, Goad said.

Tyne echoed Goad's thoughts on multidirectional information sharing. ASU's role in CCI is to serve as a convener, he said, bringing together on-the-ground experts from towns and cities to connect with each other and with ASU faculty whose research can help inform policies.

"Municipalities don't need someone to tell them how to do their job," Tyne said. "What they need is advice. How do we translate this information? How do you frame it in a way that residents relate to and fully understand? That's what this initiative is going to be able to do at a very high level."

Cities and towns want to do their best to provide cost-efficient solutions and high-quality service to their communities, Tyne explained, while residents want to be able to trust and understand that their leaders are spending tax dollars wisely and providing services that matter.

"Using data strategically in decision-making helps cities and residents achieve these objectives," he said.

CCI held its inaugural meeting on Aug. 13, bringing together data policy representatives from 24 communities. The day focused on important issues identified by municipalities across the state, including data management, water, and AI literacy and policy. Municipal administrators and staff joined policy experts in these areas to share experiences and discuss strategies.

Tyne said that despite attendees' diverse backgrounds and experiences, it was not difficult to find common ground. There were deep discussions regarding how to convey sensitive and complex material to community audiences, he said.

Meetings of the group, both in person and virtual, will continue quarterly. The next phase of CCI will be working with communities to develop a platform for sharing best practices on emerging policy issues and data management tools for local governments.

The School of Public Affairs is part of the Watts College of Public Service and Community Solutions.

*This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).*

## Main image



Administrators from Arizona towns and cities discuss strategic approaches to data decisions at the Collaborative Cities Initiative inaugural meeting on Aug. 13. Photo by Allison JoAnn Lester/Arizona State University