Emerging Technology Open Working Group

City & County of San Francisco

Learning from Our Friends

How other cities are tackling emerging technology

Looking to cities around the country (and the world) not only allows San Francisco to explore new, emerging technologies but also helps the City learn about effective implementation models, strategies for promoting equity and engaging our community, and methods for mitigating unintended consequences.

Below is a sampling of what we have learned from Seattle, Oakland, New York City, and Portland.

Seattle - Dockless Bikes

In 2017, Seattle began a year long pilot program to test dockless bikes (including electric bikes) and scooters. In order to receive a permit for the pilot, companies are required to comply with safety and financial regulations as well as rules for parking, data sharing, and ensuring all citizens have access to the bikes.

Highlights:
- Companies need to share anonymized user demographic data with Seattle or their partner, the University of Washington. The latter option allows the city to evaluate impact without the data being made public and shared with companies' competitors.
- Companies are required to include neighborhoods identified as economically distressed in 20 percent of their service area.
- Companies pay something similar to a security deposit to cover any costs the city might incur during the pilot.
- Ridership is high with only a few accidents but parking in the right of way has been problematic.

Oakland - Privacy & Surveillance

In 2016, Oakland created a Privacy Commission — comprised of select Council members and a Mayoral appointee — to provide oversight on the purchase and use of surveillance equipment. In 2018, City Council gave the Commission more authority with the passage of the Surveillance and Community Safety Ordinance.

Highlights:
- The ordinance states that any department proposal to use surveillance technology must be reviewed and evaluated by the Commission.

- Meaningful public engagement is required and "significantly weighted" in the decision making process.

New York City - WiFi Kiosks

In 2014, Mayor De Blasio issued a request for proposals (RFP) to repurpose payphones and provide free WiFi and the ability to make calls. Additionally, the solution needed to be accessible for those with disabilities and capable of adding new features over time. A company called CityBridge won with their LinkNYC kiosk.

Highlights:
- In addition to the above capabilities, the 9.5 foot tall kiosks are equipped with device charging capabilities and a tablet that could browse maps, city services, and the internet.
- The kiosks were part of a digital equity campaign to provide more New Yorkers with access to the internet.
- Some kiosks include advertising. The franchise is expected to produce $17.5 million in guaranteed annual revenue for the City of New York through June 2026.
- Some unintended consequences include individuals visiting inappropriate websites and monopolizing kiosks. This led to the disabling of the tablets to the internet.

Portland - Traffic Sensors

In 2018, Portland announced an 18-month pilot program that will install 200 traffic sensors along three high-traffic corridors that rank as some of the city's most dangerous. The city partnered with General Electric, Intel, and AT&T for this project, which is intended to improve street safety.

Highlights:
- The sensors will collect data including the ratio of drivers, bicyclists, and pedestrians on the road as well as the speed of cars and where pedestrians tend to cross.
- This the first major project of Portland's "Smart Cities PDX Initiative," a framework for emerging technology with the stated focus of using technology to improve the lives of people of color and those with disabilities.
- Installing the sensors will cost Portland $1,012,000. Ninety percent of the funding came from transportation revenue and building development fees revenue and the remainder came from the program's private partners.

- Other cities like New York City and Seattle have pilots of traffic sensors to reduce traffic and have seen initial promising results.