

CES 2019: Muni Leaders Talk Education, Working with Citizens and Data

Theo Douglas | January 10, 2019



LAS VEGAS — Elected and appointed officials from three major cities emphasized the importance of working closely with residents, partnering with education and business leaders and being equitable in dealings with the tech industry as strategies that can help municipalities move into innovation and technology, during two panel discussions at the Consumer Electronics Show.

At “Taking the Lead on Innovation in Cities,” on Jan. 9 at CES, Los Angeles Councilman Joe Buscaino and Washington, D.C., Mayor Muriel Bowser both leaned heavily on involving educators and business leaders in training the next generation of tech workers.

Buscaino, whose district includes the disadvantaged areas of Watts and Wilmington, said the city has worked through its economic and workforce development departments and the local chamber of commerce to create opportunities for children to be exposed to tech. Los Angeles, he said, has also worked with community colleges to streamline a path for young students to reach local tech industry. Hackathons and these strategic partnerships, the councilman told the audience, have been key.

“We have a talent pool already existing in the city of L.A., within the workforce and in city government but we can’t do it alone. This is why it’s important for us in the city of Los Angeles to work from kindergarten through 12th grade, hand-in-hand, through community colleges as well as science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (STEAM) education,” Buscaino said — noting the city is also working to create entry points into tech for students without college degrees.

Bowser agreed, lamenting that liberal arts degrees like her own may not guarantee high-paying jobs as they once did. The mayor, recently sworn in to a second term, questioned why, if cybersecurity positions are going unfilled, universities aren’t working together to offer the degrees students need to claim them.

“It costs a lot of money and they don’t necessarily link back to a good-paying job. I think that from a public policy dollars perspective, we have to just get much more simple,” Bowser said.

The District has also taken direct aim at attracting and keeping young technologists, Bowser said, by incentivizing companies to move there and hire locally. She acknowledged that the city entered the fray with a pitch for Amazon’s second headquarters, eliciting some laughter from the audience, but said the methodology in luring the tech behemoth was similar to how it would approach any smaller company.

“The truth is, what we pitch for Amazon we would pitch for the little guy too. The same incentives are available. If you hire D.C. residents, if you locate in D.C., you qualify for technology incentives. That’s how important it is to us and that’s why we’ve been able to retain and grow technology talent in our city,” Bowser said.

During “It Takes A Village: Building Smart Communities,” Jan. 9 at the Westgate Las Vegas Resort & Casino, San Diego Chief Data Officer Maksim Pecherskiy touched on a theme voiced [the previous day](#) by Mike Zeto, AT&T vice president and general manager of smart cities. Zeto had acknowledged that the idea of building infrastructure in smart cities seems to be a perennial topic of interest — but said he saw a move toward “being more citizen-centric and getting the citizens involved” as a potential trend in 2019, one that could make it easier for cities to scale and find project funding if they secure citizen buy-in.

Pecherskiy told his audience that government needs to move away from a top-down way of doing things toward building in structured user research cycles to understand issues and problems, saying, “ This is an area where critical community engagement makes or breaks the entire thing and we need to start taking that seriously.”

In an interview with *Government Technology*, he said government might take a cue from software development cycles, which have myriad mock-ups, tests and iterations — all closely followed by the vendor to inform the nascent product.

In an interview with *Government Technology*, he said government might take a cue from software development cycles, which have myriad mock-ups, tests and iterations — all closely followed by the vendor to inform the nascent product.

“I think that it’s important for us to really venerate and admire good maintenance of software and good practices of maintenance. And so for us, we’re still going to be doing a lot of process improvement projects, we’re going to be doing some data stuff but really, we have some things that we built that now we need to maintain or upgrade or secure,” Pecherskiy said, highlighting the role of maintenance in avoiding the much-hyped Y2K disaster that ultimately never materialized.

During the conversation about “Taking the Lead on Innovation,” panelist David Maloney, director of strategic partnerships and development at the National League of Cities, said widespread enthusiasm for open data portals that emerged in cities six or seven years ago continues to empower officials to become smarter from an operations perspective as they work more closely with data. In an interview with *GT*, Buscaino agreed.

“If we can look at delivering services in a more efficient, effective way, that’s what we owe to the people that we represent. I have found that through the open data portal, we have become more efficient,” Buscaino said, indicating that he’s leveraged the city’s open data portal to connect the work of two separate departments — Public Works and Transportation — on the common issue of street operations and maintenance.

<http://www.govtech.com/computing/CES-2019-Muni-Leaders-Talk-Education-Working-With-Citizens-and-Data.html>