

Shireen Santosham

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A graduate of Harvard Business School and Kennedy School of Government, Shireen Santosham came to the public sector in 2016 as senior policy advisor and chief innovation officer in the office of San Jose Mayor Sam Liccardo.

She previously directed the Connected Society program and was a senior manager of the Connected Women program, both for GSMA, the London-based mobile phone industry organization. And Santosham, who decided to attend boarding school in India as a high school junior, has made closing the digital divide a continued focus in the public sector.

"I just really thought the world was a big place and I wanted to explore it and contribute," said Santosham, who spent part of her earlier childhood living on the White Mountain Apache Reservation in Arizona where her father was a doctor.

[click_to_tweet]We're honoring @SSantosham for her work in shaping the smart city vision in America's 10th largest city. #govtech[/click_to_tweet]

Santosham, who leads Liccardo's innovation team — helping shape the mayor's smart city vision to become the most innovative U.S. municipality by 2020 — worked with

Stanford University to commission a study of low-income families that would better inform the city's broadband moves.

Subsequently, City Hall conducted a citywide broadband assessment; and in April 2016, announced Terragraph, a partnership with Facebook Connectivity Lab to bring free Wi-Fi throughout downtown. Currently 250 downtown Terragraph nodes are in the internal testing phase.

"I think the digital divide is a social justice issue, especially as we look to the future, because kids who don't have access to the Internet don't have an onramp to future opportunities," she said. With that goal in mind, San Jose also worked with Sprint to get devices for 10,000 low-income students, along with Internet access throughout their high school careers.

Autonomous vehicles have also been a key focus for the city, and Santosham helped spearhead a series of roundtables with the mayor and industry representatives that shaped a framework for AV deployments around safe, environmentally friendly vehicles and shared transportation. Later in 2018, the city plans to launch AV pilots, with the goal of having four projects underway in the next two years.

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