

City Innovation Snapshot | Houston, United States

Overview

- Mayor: Sylvester Turner
- Lead staff on innovation: Jesse Bounds
- Population of municipality: 2.3 million (2016)
- Innovation/open data website: <http://data.houstontx.gov/>

Spotlight on Houston | Water Innovation Hub

Houston has created [a water innovation hub](#) in the wake of Hurricane Harvey to test and deploy innovative solutions on drinking water, wastewater and storm water infrastructure in the city. Through an RFP for solutions, Houston has selected 10 vendors to demonstrate their products and show value. The process is managed by a non-profit water advocacy organisation at no-cost to the City, although the technology may eventually be procured by the city if proven successful.

Vision and approach to innovation capacity

The city's innovation strategy

Along with 56% of cities surveyed, Houston does not have an **explicit innovation strategy**.

The city most closely associates innovation capacity with the following terms:

Technological innovation

Data analytics

Approaches to innovation capacity

Similar to over one-third of cities surveyed, Houston approaches innovation capacity in **specific policy areas**.

The **top two priority policy areas** for the city's innovation work include:

Social welfare / social services

Built environment

Most common innovation activities

Houston's most common innovation activities are **promoting data-driven analytics; engaging residents in new ways; and developing new solutions based on digital technologies**. Its innovation activity also includes **taking risks or testing new ideas**.



Funding for innovation capacity	
Funding to support innovation capacity	Types of activities being funded
<p>Like 77% of cities surveyed, Houston has dedicated funding to support innovation capacity, which originates from the following source:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Municipal budget (operating budget) 	<p>Houston's funding for innovation capacity is generally directed towards launching or sustaining a project, and generating ideas & brainstorming. These are the two most commonly funded activities among all cities surveyed.</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; margin-top: 10px;"> <div style="text-align: center; background-color: #e0f2ff; padding: 10px; border-radius: 10px;"> Launching or sustaining a project </div> <div style="text-align: center; background-color: #e0f2ff; padding: 10px; border-radius: 10px;"> Idea generation & brainstorming </div> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; margin-top: 10px;"> <div style="text-align: center; background-color: #d3d3d3; padding: 10px; border-radius: 10px;"> Investing in digital systems </div> <div style="text-align: center; background-color: #d3d3d3; padding: 10px; border-radius: 10px;"> Investing in physical infrastructure </div> <div style="text-align: center; background-color: #d3d3d3; padding: 10px; border-radius: 10px;"> Paying for services </div> </div>
Organisational structure & staffing	Partnerships for innovation & data
 <p>Situated in the Mayor's office, Houston's dedicated team for innovation consists of 4 staff. In addition, the Public Works Department also has an Innovation team of 3 people focused solely on that department's innovation efforts.</p> <p>Staff skills and profiles include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Project manager ✓ Data scientist ✓ Communication officer ✓ Sociologist 	 <p>Houston has developed partnerships to promote its innovation capacity with not-for-profit organisations.</p> <p>To improve data use, the city has also developed data partnerships with academia and think tanks to collect and analyse data.</p>
Measuring outcomes	
<p>Policy areas that benefit from sufficient data, or lack sufficient data, to support innovation capacity in the city:</p> <div style="display: grid; grid-template-columns: repeat(5, 1fr); gap: 10px; margin-top: 10px;"> <div style="background-color: #8cc63f; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Transport / mobility</div> <div style="background-color: #c0392b; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Economic development</div> <div style="background-color: #c0392b; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Housing & built environment</div> <div style="background-color: #8cc63f; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Policing & law enforcement</div> <div style="background-color: #8cc63f; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Health</div> <div style="background-color: #8cc63f; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Water</div> <div style="background-color: #8cc63f; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Waste and sewage</div> <div style="background-color: #c0392b; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Labour markets & skills</div> <div style="background-color: #8cc63f; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Environment & climate change</div> <div style="background-color: #8cc63f; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Education</div> <div style="background-color: #c0392b; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Culture</div> <div style="background-color: #c0392b; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Social inclusion, equity</div> <div style="background-color: #cccccc; color: black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Public works</div> <div style="background-color: #c0392b; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Tourism</div> <div style="background-color: #8cc63f; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Digital governance</div> </div> <p>NB: No response provided by the city for the policy areas in grey.</p>	<p>Innovation is helping the city to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Improve service delivery ✓ Save costs and gain efficiency within the public sector ✓ Improve internal government operations <p>The most critical success factors in supporting the city's innovation work:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Dedicated innovation team ✓ Leadership from Mayor ✓ Culture of innovation in city ✓ Support from outside city administration