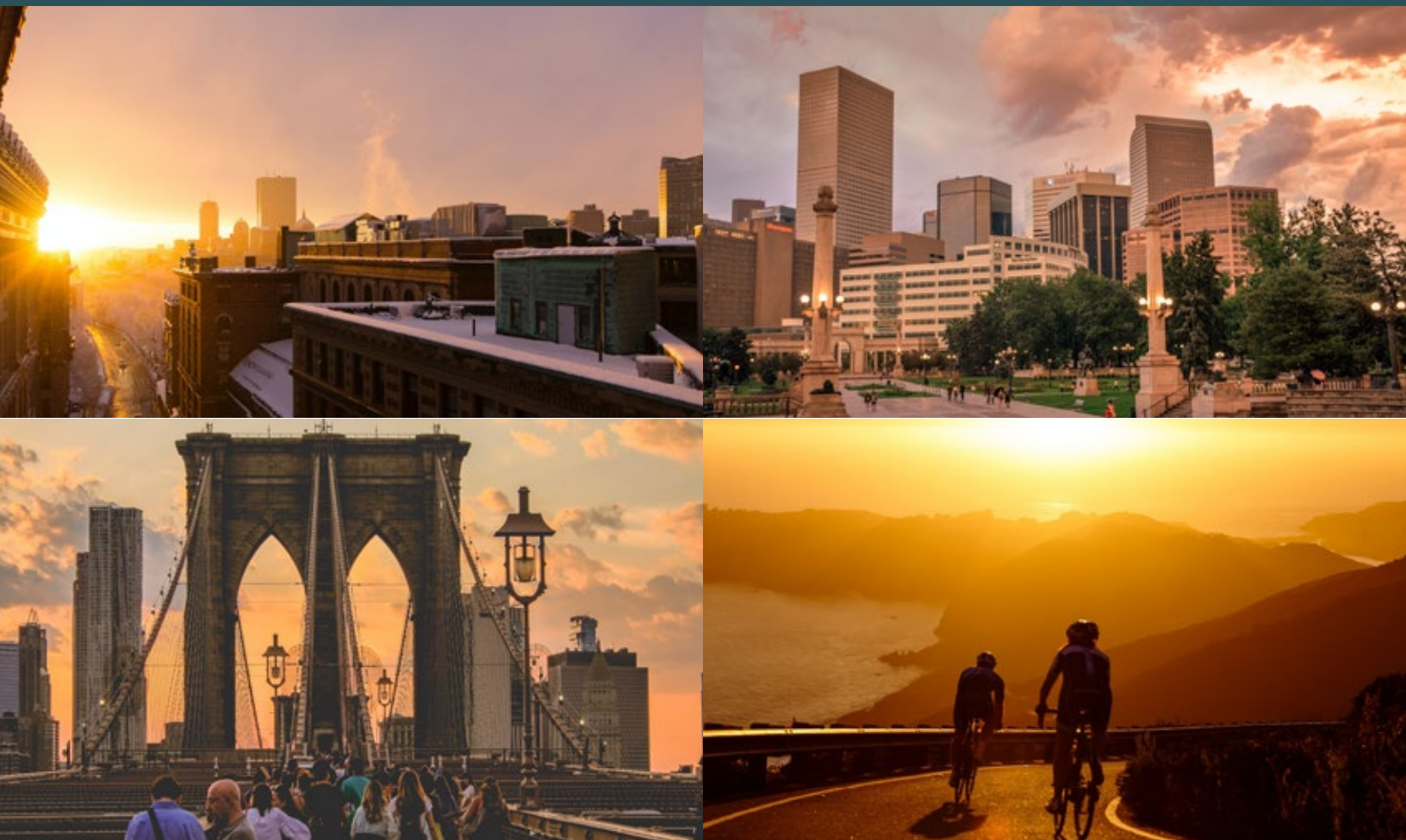




Centre for  
Public Impact  
A BCG FOUNDATION

# Reflect and reimagine:

Learning from the work of our  
North America team in 2021



# About the Centre for Public Impact

At the Centre for Public Impact, we believe in the potential of government to bring about better outcomes for people. Yet, we have found that the systems, structures, and processes of government today are often not set up to respond to the complex challenges we face as a society. That's why we have an emerging vision to reimagine government so that it works for everyone.

A global not-for-profit organisation founded by the Boston Consulting Group, we act as a learning partner for governments, public servants, and the diverse network of changemakers who are leading the charge to reimagine government. We work with them to hold space to collectively make sense of the complex challenges we face and drive meaningful change through learning and experimentation.

This work was led by Megan Humes, Program Manager at CPI North America, supported by John Burgoyne, Grant Mathis, Elysa Neumann, and Kate Stenclik.

Thank you to Jorge Fanjul, Kevval Hanna, and Dan Vogel for their contributions to the work.



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## A note from our Director in North America

At the dawn of a new year, the challenges before us underscore the urgency of CPI's mission to reimagine government so that it works for everyone. Governments across North America desperately need bold new models, new approaches, and new ways of thinking and working to meet the complex challenges of our time, serve people and communities more effectively, and rebuild trust.

As a [learning partner](#), we work with changemakers to build the mindsets, cultures, and capabilities needed to spur continuous learning, which will create conditions where everyone can flourish. We are also constantly reflecting on our own work and how we can be a more effective learning partner. In that spirit, this inaugural reflection report aims to take a step back, evaluate what we've learned, and use those insights to sharpen our efforts to deliver on our mission.

What's clear is that when it comes to better government, the technocratic, managerial models of the 20th century are not up to the challenges of the 21st century. Instead, our work in 2021 further affirmed the need for governments to be:

- **More human:** Putting [people](#) and [relationships](#) at the center
- **More agile:** Maximizing the capacity of public systems to [experiment, learn, and adapt](#)
- **More innovative:** Embracing a [cross-sectoral](#), [systems](#) approach to complexity
- **More inclusive:** [Sharing power](#), [elevating new voices](#), and [dismantling racism](#)

To change how public servants and public systems operate will require significant cultural shifts. Successful cultural or behavioral change is hard work that takes time and intention. We have learned that we, and other partners, have the best chance of shifting cultures by purposefully designing



programs around learning and adapting to local contexts. To this end, our team continues to experiment with new tools, content, and approaches to support public problem solvers.

When I tell people I lead an organization focused on reimagining government, I'm often met with deep cynicism. Many people believe that governments are incapable of change. I understand these feelings; with the headlines we read and the challenges we face, it can be easy to feel disheartened. But there are many changemakers around the world that are working hard to make life better, and too often their successes aren't shared and celebrated.

I am honored to have a front-row seat to their work. To see the humans at the center of these stories. These folks are working diligently to listen better, correct past injustices, innovate with intention, partner differently, and create genuine human connections that combat isolation and division while restoring trust. We are honored to work alongside them, learn from them, and encourage them.

If you're reading this, you share our belief in the positive potential of government and our passion for making it work better for all people. Thank you. We're grateful to be on this journey with you, we'd welcome your [feedback and reactions](#), and we're excited for what we can learn together in the days ahead.

Onward,

Dan



# Our work in 2021



## Our programs with partners

In 2021, CPI in North America worked with over 170 different governments on an incredible spread of issues, further clarifying what a ‘reimagined government that works for everyone’ looks, acts, and feels like. We kicked off 2021 building innovation capacity all over the globe with one of our longest-standing partners, worked with multiple levels of government on issues like earning legitimacy and using tech to serve residents better, and helped counties across the government spark cultures of innovation.



[Failing Forward in Local Government](#): A year-long program that supports governments’ ability to spark and sustain cultures of innovation. Failing Forward applies a top-down and bottom-up approach to spark and sustain culture changes.



[Innovation Track](#): A capacity-building track of the Bloomberg-Harvard City Leadership Initiative that expands cities’ ability to think outside the box and more effectively tackle challenging problems by putting residents at the center of designing and testing new ideas. In 2021, 11 cities and 96 core team members benefited from the Innovation Track.



[Innovation Training Program](#): A program where interdisciplinary city teams build core innovation capacities as they design, test, and prototype solutions to a pressing city problem. In 2021, 12 cities representing 84 departments received Innovation Training.



[Global Mayors Challenge](#): A yearlong competition that challenged hundreds of cities to submit their most innovative solutions to a pressing urban challenge. In 2021, the Challenge went global, with 600+ cities from around the world working to address challenges made worse by COVID-19.



[Pandemic Solutions Group](#): A network of public officials from 21 states, 28 localities, and six community partners devoted to rapidly scaling COVID-19 testing, tracing, masking, and vaccination, while ensuring equitable distribution and access.



[The Opportunity Project for Cities](#): An 18-week sprint where cities leverage public data, technology, and community input to address community challenges. In 2021, Saint Paul and San José focused on housing-related challenges caused or exacerbated by COVID-19.





## Our CPI programs

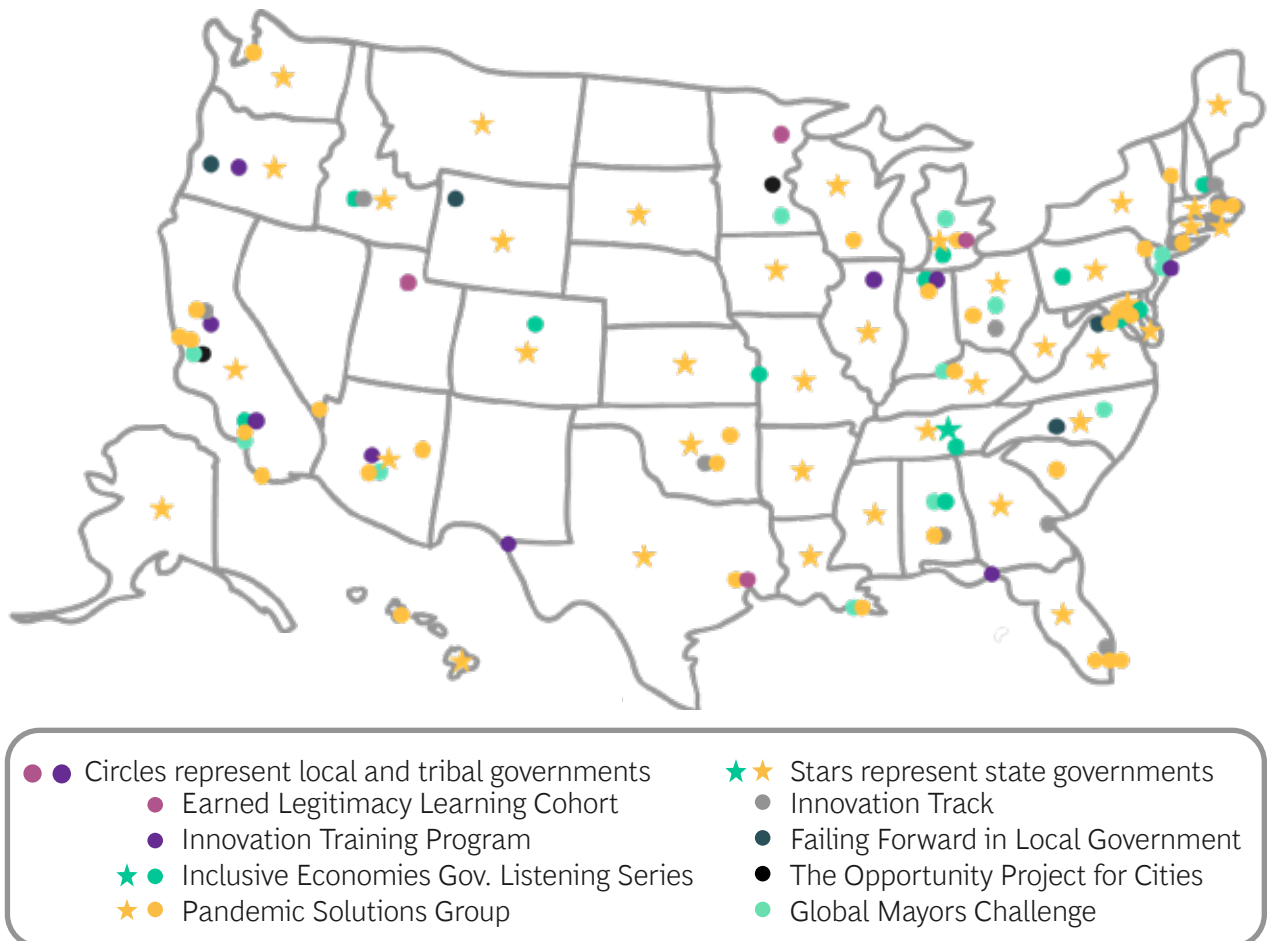
If CPI believes an issue-area or opportunity has the potential to drive significant positive impact among public servants and the communities they serve, we launch programming directly with governments to learn more. If you are interested in learning more partnering with us on future efforts, [get in touch](#).

[Earned Legitimacy Learning Cohort](#): A 10-week program designed and executed by CPI where cities and counties work to address past harms experienced by marginalized communities, understand and dismantle inequitable power dynamics, and rebuild more legitimate systems.

[Inclusive Economies Government Listening Series](#): A series of 30 interviews conducted by CPI with 12 local governments to understand their most significant roadblocks to building inclusive economies and explore how CPI and other changemakers can best support them.

## Where in the world

In 2021, CPI in North America worked with 173 governments across the globe. In addition to those pictured below, we worked with 40 governments outside of the United States.





## Acting as a learning partner to reimagine government

We are humbled that so many governments and public servants opened up and joined us on the journey of reimagining government at a time when [public trust in government](#) is near historic lows and the COVID-19 pandemic continues to strain governments at all levels. In the face of unprecedented hardships and complexities, these changemakers remained committed to improving the lives of their families, friends, and communities. They are the true heart of what we mean when we say that we believe in the positive potential of government.

CPI acts as a learning partner for governments, public servants, and the diverse network of changemakers leading the charge to reimagine government. Our work is guided by our emerging vision for what a reimagined government should be: one that adapts to address the complex challenges we face, emphasizes the value of human relationships, and optimizes for learning rather than control. Ultimately, we believe this is the key to making government work for everyone.

In 2021, CPI in North America worked with

**920** public servants

-- representing --

**173** cities, counties, tribal nations, and states

— engaging with —

**7,225**  
RESIDENTS

and facilitating hundreds of connections among public servants working on similar issues.

**100%**

individuals surveyed report **embracing an innovation mindset** in their work

(ITP, IT, TOPC)

**94%**

individuals surveyed say CPI programming **directly impacted** their work

(ELLC, GMC, PSG, IT)

**92%**

individuals surveyed believe their **City Hall** is more open to innovation

(ITP, IT)

**99%**

individuals surveyed report **learning new skills** in all competency areas

(ITP, IT, TOPC)

**70+%**

participants in our Legitimacy Cohort better understand how to strengthen government/community relationships



Participants report our programs shift their work culture to be more creative and collaborative



(ITP, IT, TOPC)

CPI does not aim to prescribe solutions to governments and their allies. Instead, we work with them to hold space to collectively make sense of the complex challenges we face and drive meaningful change through learning and experimentation. In North America, we do this through intentional and engaging workshop and program design, compassionate facilitation, and individualized leadership coaching.

**Because we are a learning partner, we think of our work as more than just individual projects.** This means we regularly bring together what we learn, identify broader trends across our projects, and reflect on what it all means.

The following report explores those connections, and dives further into our three key takeaways:

1. Governments must make significant internal culture shifts to work better and best serve the public.
2. Governments must center relationships and share power to understand community challenges and create solutions.
3. Organizations that support governments must intentionally design programs around learning and adapting to local contexts.

We'll share examples from our program participants, emerging solutions, and our impact. Then, we'll take a look at what CPI in North America has planned for 2022.



# What we learned in 2021



## 1. Governments must make significant internal culture shifts to work better and best serve the public.

Governments must make significant changes to how they work - taking a step back from the status quo to reflect on their internal culture, priorities, and definitions of success. Local governments have the potential to drive huge impact and positive change in their communities. However, traditional ways of working and measuring success are often not set up to respond to the complex challenges we face as a society. Here are some shifts governments can make to better drive meaningful change:

- **Leaders must prioritize, create space, and adequately resource the learning process (including failing forward).** In any organization, it can be difficult to prioritize time for reflection, documenting lessons learned, or any of the other tasks that foster a continuous learning culture. Groups led by individuals that invest time and resources into learning have better results and more substantial impact.
- **Governments must be proactive, not reactive.** The constant remediation of poor outcomes does not prevent them from happening again. Proactive governments look to address the root cause of issues.
- **Governments must be agile in the face of complexity.** Complex problems rarely have one fix-all solution. The ability to evaluate incremental impact and iterate on solutions is indispensable in today's world.

El Paso, Texas, is **prioritizing and resourcing learning** by creating its first Performance Office.

The Performance Office is responsible for deploying learning tools and training to connect a continuous improvement model across operations. One of the leaders of this department will be a Chief Learning Officer.

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*“ Our approach is people-centered and is systems- and process-focused so we may continue to deliver results. At the heart of this important work is a relentless belief that learning and innovation, when harmonized, can’t help but lead to meaningful and continuous improvement---for us, our organization and vibrant El Paso community.”*

Juliana Baldwin-Muñoz, Learning + Innovation Director & Roman Sanchez, Chief Innovation Officer, City of El Paso

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Governments should examine their role in the community and intentionally build partnerships to fill gaps. Here are some ways to think about building and centering partnerships:

- **Leverage external partnerships to help navigate potential political barriers.** We often see hesitancy from public servants to shift from implementing their new skills to championing broader cultural change. By working with external organizations, experimenting with new ways of working can feel lower-risk because the potential internal political ramifications of making bold suggestions are removed.
- **Involve a wide variety of collaborators in the process.** Intentional partnerships can give governments the freedom to try new ways of working with the community and new forms of governance. It also brings valuable, fresh perspectives to the table.

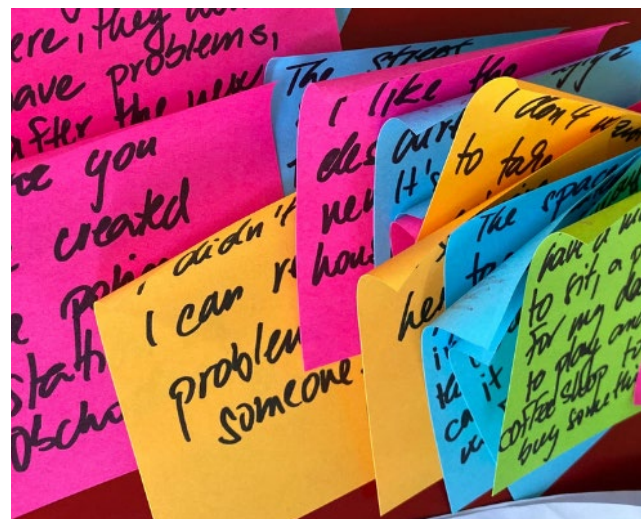


*“We’re not going in with a solution, we don’t know what we’re going to come out with and that is scary, but we are going to go in and talk to people and figure out what their experience is, and understand what their problems are, and then test our assumptions about those problems, and then we’re going to build something with them.”*

Rachel Walch, Senior Innovation Consultant, Saint Paul

*“The city is your laboratory - try new initiatives, if they don’t work, you walk away, if they do, you can upscale them to help more people.”*

**Jermaine Freeman**, Senior Advisor,  
City of Chattanooga



## 2. Governments must center relationships and share power to understand community challenges and create solutions.

Communities are better served when we push governments to prioritize building relationships as a part of our programming. We see this with residents, across departments, and across levels of seniority. But breaking down existing hierarchies and ways of doing things to center relationships is no easy task. Here are some areas governments should prioritize:

- **Reimagine traditional structures, including hierarchy and departmental silos.** Consider where you can bring forth new perspectives and identify challenges with a proposed solution that may not have otherwise been considered.
- **Aim to cocreate with residents, not just consult.** Residents should be engaged repeatedly as partners in the work. Consistency and follow-through on promises are essential to building trusting relationships with residents.
- **Leverage your professional counterparts from other cities and regions.** Horizontal learning networks and cross-city relationships are important spaces to share wins, seek advice, and sometimes just kvetch with peers that share your experience.



Building relationships to the point where you can cocreate with residents, rather than simply gain resident feedback, is a long-term effort that will be challenging. Here are some tips to get started building strong relationships with residents:

- **Be transparent and real with residents.** Residents want their government to feel human. This means admitting mistakes, being vulnerable in communication, eliminating jargon, and reducing barriers to access, such as confusing websites.
- **Lean on trusted local community partners.** Trusted partners can serve as bridges between governments and communities, connecting new voices while providing an honest intermediary for residents that aren't comfortable interacting directly with governments.

- **Prioritize equity.** To make things better for everyone, all people’s voices must be heard. To include historically marginalized communities, public servants must recognize that past policies and government actions harmed these groups. Admitting these residents were not always treated with dignity or respect is the first step to rebuilding trust so that they may feel empowered to meaningfully contribute, cocreate, and buy into government efforts in the future.
- **Plan enough time to reach the right residents.** Recruiting residents, preparing for workshops or interviews, and scheduling time together always takes longer than you think it will. Add buffer time to your work plan.
- **Take advantage of digital tools with in-person connections.** Tech creates new opportunities to engage with the public, but it is important to remember to also meet people where they are in person. A human touch is key!

In New Orleans, Louisiana, feedback that residents didn’t feel they were getting enough information from the city made the government realize their communications were missing a human touch.

*“Through conversations with residents, we realized the design and content of signs really matter to people. Residents gave us invaluable feedback leading us to improve content, design, materials, and even working to establish non-language versions of signage that can be universally understood.”*

Liana Elliott, Deputy Chief of Staff,  
City of New Orleans Mayor LaToya Cantrell



*“As we connected the dots on the Miro board which showed us the picture of where power lies, and we shared that with the community, hearing their perspectives and recognizing how surprised they were to be asked to provide their experiences and opinions was awe inspiring. It gave them hope as well as our team.”*

Linda Hudson, Manager, Housing and Community Resources,  
Harris County Community Services Department



### 3. Organizations that support governments must intentionally design programs around learning and adapting to local contexts.

As an organization that supports governments as a learning partner, we're constantly reflecting on our own work. CPI in North America has been experimenting with tools, delivery mechanisms, and content for over four years. While we're amazed at how much we have learned and grown, we remain driven to craft better ways to help governments. Here are some best practices that organizations tackling similar challenges should keep in mind:

#### Before programming kicks off:

- **Focus curriculum on solving timely, relevant issues.** Support teams to develop new ways of working by coaching public servants through initiatives they are currently planning or implementing. The program's content and work should complement participants' day jobs, not add stress by arbitrarily increasing their workload.
- **Invest in setting up a strong core team.** Whether your core team consist of public servants, community leaders, residents, or any combination of the above, our most successful core teams are a diverse, committed group with the individual influence or authority to make decisions in their team or organization.
- **Craft curriculum to meet the local context.** The curriculum's language, examples, and pace may not resonate across different regions, cultures, or levels of familiarity with the content. Spend the time upfront to get to know partners and adapt the curriculum as needed.
- **Consider how technology and virtual delivery can benefit programming,** but keep in mind the challenges it poses. The broad adoption of digital platforms like Zoom and Miro allowed us to engage with changemakers from all over the world in our programs. However, we also found that introducing new tech and tools made it more difficult for some participants to engage fully. We built 'Office Hours' and optional training into programming to address the learning curve.

***"I feel that the curriculum is incredibly robust and that the materials are super useful...the most critical support I can receive as coach consists precisely in allowing for some flexibility."***

***"Allowing us the flexibility to change curriculum as needed was a great support"***

Coaches in Latin America and Middle East (respectively), Global Mayors Challenge



### During programming:

- **Incorporate the infrastructure for reflection and learning into the program.** As a learning partner, we aim to coach our partners to master tools and techniques that can be adapted to solve problems outside of the program. A useful technique to help governments build the capacity to reflect on what they're learning is sensemaking, which means creating space and facilitating conversations that promote listening and reflecting on rapidly changing problems beyond the usual boundaries.
- **Vary the structure of meetings and workshops.** Design programming that promotes intra-cohort relationship building while learning and working with new concepts. Provide space for core teams to further discuss content presented during the cohort-wide sessions.
- **Be prepared to adapt the curriculum to the needs of different teams.** It is difficult to cut out content that seems important during curriculum design, but including every example and exercise our CPI staff found interesting and useful left some teams feeling stressed and stretched (not a good environment for learning). Creating a robust, engaging program that adds value but not stress requires discipline and iteration.
- **Seek regular feedback throughout the program and be open to incorporating it.** A continuous learning mindset recognizes feedback is essential to improvement. This is another reason programs should include as many perspectives as are relevant and feasible. Provide participants with opportunities to share honest feedback however they feel most comfortable doing so.



In the Earned Legitimacy Learning Cohort, participants were offered a **mix of session structures** to encourage learning with peers *and* working on local projects. Sessions included concept workshops, local application, and offices hours.

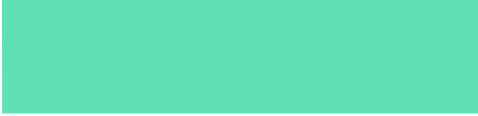
***“We’re so used to being in these rooms, we stopped trying to open the doors.”***

Inclusive Economies Government Listening Series




# Whats next for CPI in North America





The past year showed us that CPI's vision for government excites public servants and residents alike. Governments are committed to doing things better for residents, but achieving a vision that requires structural changes takes time.

CPI is working to understand and meet governments where they are, providing the structures for learning, shifting power to the true 'experts' (residents/frontline staff), and bringing these groups together and empowering them to drive change. In the next year, we will dig further into how our role as a learning partner can best support governments and how to build cultures of continuous learning, internally and externally. While we know this will require constant reflection and experimentation, we have identified the following as starting points:

- **Continue to engage governments after programming ends.** While we have checked in on past participants and have even brought them in as presenters to other programs, we are excited to experiment with ways our alumni can actively engage with each other and additional CPI resources.
  - **Build expertise in the art of facilitation.** This year, we saw that being a confident and compassionate facilitator who can ask the right questions and create vulnerable spaces is a core skill for a learning partner. We are looking forward to studying and testing more facilitation techniques in our future programs.
  - **Learn when to step back.** Even though we know that people usually learn best by doing, it can be challenging to step back and watch program participants put their new skills into practice knowing that they may make mistakes. Many of us are adjusting to the mindset that it can be more helpful for our partners to try and fail to do something, and see themselves learning, than for our team to deliver the end product or complete the task ourselves.
  - **Support governments' journeys to optimize for learning, which will vary from place to place.** Learning requires both the cultural infrastructure to [fail forward](#) and the physical (or virtual) infrastructure to ensure information lives and circulates within the organization itself. As we build this capacity internally, we will better understand how to infuse these concepts and tools into our programming for our government partners.
  - **Continue to sharpen the tools we use to serve as learning partners.** Some of the tools we use to learn with governments are immediately additive and useful beyond the program, such as systems maps and design elements. Others can be distracting or confusing in some cases. This year, we'll continue to examine which tools we should add, refine, or remove to improve learning outcomes with our partners.
- 



- **More consistently measure our impact.** We have a clear picture of success, track metrics within projects, and know the incredible value of stories in describing our impact. However, we have not yet identified what we can and should measure across projects to describe the incredible work we've done more concisely. This report is our first step in that direction.
- **Work with partners equally as excited by learning as we are.** We serve as a learning partner for our delivery and government partners. That requires examining how best to learn together throughout our work, from program design to final products. We're excited to identify more government and civic partners interested in pushing this work forward.

**Find out how a learning partner can help you reimagine government so that it works for everyone.**

**GET IN TOUCH >>**







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