

IBM supports economic growth opportunities in South Africa

Durban has been awarded an IBM Smarter Cities Challenge grant, valued at \$500,000 USD is to fund consultations with IBM experts and senior consultants.

The IBM consultants will work with the city leadership to develop a skills development roadmap aligned to eThekweni's economic development and job creation plan.



"The eThekweni Municipality is looking forward to working with the team of executives from IBM, exploring ways to improve the city's skills base and increase economic opportunities in the city," says eThekweni Municipality mayor James Nxumalo.

Skills training and economic development

Durban is one of only three African cities to receive this grant and one of only 16 cities around the world to qualify and receive the highly prized three-week engagement. Nxumalo said that the eThekweni Municipality would focus its efforts on boosting economic development.

For this consultative engagement, the IBM team will invest months studying aspects of and best case practice of skills training and economic development. Then they will spend three weeks on the ground in the region gathering and analysing all relevant data, while meeting in person with dozens of members of the government, citizens, businesses, and not-for-profit communities. In doing so, they will gather diverse perspectives about the causes and potential solutions to the challenge facing eThekweni Municipality's leadership. At the conclusion of these studies, IBM will present comprehensive recommendations for solving the problem, followed weeks later by a more detailed, written plan for its implementation.

The team, who will arrive in South Africa later this year, will comprise of IBMers who hail from all over the world, and who offer diverse perspectives and skills. The team typically will include skills across marketing, communications, technology, research and development, government, human resources, finance, business, legal matters and specific disciplines such as transportation, energy and health.

Steps towards a 'smarter city'

"This is a significant investment to support the city in its aspirations to be a Smart City. We believe that by providing critical thinking and solutions beyond technology we can support the development goals particularly around economic development and poverty alleviation," said Abraham Thomas, country GM of IBM South Africa. "The efforts of our international colleagues will also compliment the Smarter Cities work we currently have underway with several cities and metros in South Africa."

The Smarter Cities Challenge was originally conceived in 2011 as a three-year grant program, but highly positive feedback and effective results have encouraged IBM to extend the initiative. In its first three years, IBM's Smarter Cities Challenge deployed 600 experts on six-person teams who provided strategic and practical advice to 100 municipalities.

Previous grant recipients have implemented IBM's Smarter Cities Challenge recommendations and tangibly improved the lives of their citizens including Townsville, Australia which is reducing its water and energy costs. Its efforts have earned it that country's prestigious National Smart Infrastructure Award. And the City of Tshwane used its grant to understand how it could reduce non-revenue water by as much as 25%.

Smarter Cities Challenge grants have been awarded to 116 cities out of 500 applicants over the last three years. Successful applications propose projects designed to address high priority problems of critical importance to citizens. The city or region must be able to share detailed information to help the IBM team analyse the issue. Leaders must also guarantee face-to-face access to city, regional, civic and business stakeholders for interviews with IBM team members so that they may comprehensively assess a given problem and recommend solutions.

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