

ANNUAL REPORT



LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear friends and supporters,

The High Road Strategy Center (formerly COWS) broadened its impact in 2024 even as the world around fractured and continued its democratic regress. We deepened our commitment to finding high-road ways to grow social value while increasing sustainability, inclusive fairness, and democracy.

The pages that follow update you on the Mayors Innovation Project. We've helped mayors improve pedestrian safety, connected cities to cutting-edge transportation reforms, equipped policymakers with strategies to strengthen worker protections and economic justice, and served the broader democratic community with a variety of information and advisory services.

While our name changed, our mission and purpose did not. We thank our supporters and hope we've done you proud.

Onward,



Joel Rogers

Director, High Road Strategy Center





MAYORS INNOVATION PROJECT

The Mayors Innovation Project (MIP) is a national peer-learning network of mayors committed to shared prosperity, environmental sustainability, and efficient democratic government.



OUR IMPACT

HIGH ROAD LEADERSHIP NETWORKS

Mayors face complex challenges—but they don't have to face them alone. Through our networks, we connect city leaders with the peers, experts, and resources they need to drive change. In 2024, our convenings brought together 175+ mayors and city staff, providing actionable strategies on topics like pedestrian safety, housing affordability, and climate resilience. Leaders left with real solutions—from securing federal funds to reforming zoning and ensuring election integrity. By fostering collaboration and sharing high-impact policies, we empower mayors to build more just, sustainable, and resilient communities.

Mayors Institute on Pedestrian Safety

With pedestrian fatalities on the rise, the Mayors Institute on Pedestrian Safety ([MIPS](#)) equips city leaders with strategies to make streets safer. In 2024, ten mayors participated in the 2nd cohort, providing them with hands-on workshops, funding guidance, and peer learning sessions. Highlights include Boise, ID launching a traffic safety task force, and Chattanooga, TN securing federal funding to improve pedestrian crossings. By providing mayors with the tools and knowledge to take action, MIPS is empowering mayors to lead the charge for safer streets in cities nationwide.



Boise, ID's Mayor Lauren McLean unveils new accessibility improvements on 8th street.



Chattanooga, TN's Mayor Tim Kelly prioritizes pedestrian safety with major investments and a new Safer Streets website to engage the community.

Women Mayors Network

Women mayors face unique challenges, and the Women Mayors Network ([WMN](#)) provides a space for connection, support, and leadership development. In 2024, we partnered with RepresentWomen to host a gathering where mayors shared experiences, strategies, and policy solutions that prioritize gender equity. The WMN ensures that women mayors have the tools and community to push for systemic change in their cities. Through this network, members gain access to vetted high-road policy options and resources that help advance intersectional gender equity, while also informing and supporting the broader MIP community in combating sexism and racism in leadership.

2024 Summer and Winter Meetings

Our Winter and Summer Meetings brought together 175+ mayors and city staff to tackle urgent city challenges—from election integrity to climate resilience.

At the [Winter Meeting](#), city leaders and experts guided mayors on protecting voting access ahead of the 2024 elections, securing federal infrastructure funding, and modernizing zoning policies to address the housing crisis. Keynote speaker, Ian Bassin of Protect Democracy, reinforced the essential role of local leadership in safeguarding democracy.

The [Summer Meeting](#) in Knoxville, TN, centered on violence prevention, climate action, and economic development, equipping mayors with strategies to drive community-led investments, strengthen tenant protections, and integrate sustainability across city departments. Reverend Harold Middlebrook, a civil rights leader and close friend of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., delivered the keynote address, offering a powerful reflection on leadership, justice, and community resilience.



Mayors Sangeetha Rayapati from Moline, IL and Melanie Kebler from Bend, OR pose for a quick photo at WMN reception.



Mayor Satya Rhodes-Conway highlights Madison, WI's efforts to canvass for clean energy at the Winter Meeting.



Knoxville, TN's Mayor Indya Kincannon poses for a photo with Amy Mahler, Director of Government Engagement for the Taubman Center for State and Local Government.



Mayors and city leaders gather at the Summer Meeting.

OUR IMPACT

ACTIONABLE SUPPORT FOR LOCAL LEADERS

Local leaders drive change, but they need the right tools to succeed. We provide practical resources and expert guidance to help cities tackle urgent challenges—from extreme heat to water affordability. In 2024, our Good Ideas for Cities newsletters and Water Wednesday webinars delivered actionable strategies on sustainability and equity. Through webinars, technical assistance, and policy insights, we equip leaders with the knowledge to implement bold, high-impact solutions—ensuring cities are not just prepared for the future, but actively shaping it.



Steering Committee member and former Mayor of Kankakee, IL, Chasity Wells-Armstrong, and Senior Advisor and former Mayor of Minneapolis, MN, Betsy Hodges at the Winter Meeting.

Women Mayors Research Project

Women mayors often face unique barriers while campaigning for office and serving in leadership roles. To better understand these challenges, we launched a research project, conducting a nationwide survey of all mayors and in-depth interviews with over 45 women mayors. The findings informed new tools and recommendations to support women in leadership, strengthening our commitment to equity and resilience in local government.



Water Wednesday

Our Water Wednesday webinar series provides city leaders with strategies to navigate water affordability and infrastructure challenges. In 2024, we convened national experts to address the EPA's new PFAS regulations, helping cities prepare for costly water system upgrades while protecting vulnerable households. These discussions ensure leaders have the tools to build resilient, affordable water systems.

Welcoming & Protecting Immigrants

Amid federal constraints, cities are leading efforts to welcome and protect immigrants. Our Good Ideas for Cities report highlighted innovative strategies—from sanctuary policies in San Francisco to economic attraction programs in St. Louis—helping local leaders create more inclusive, thriving communities.



Creative Tactics Cities are Using to Address the Child Care Shortage

With childcare costs skyrocketing, cities are stepping up where federal policies fall short. Our report showcased Boise, ID's property tax rebates for in-home providers, Madison, SD's tax districts for child care centers, and New Orleans, LA's voter-backed early education investment. By highlighting these models, we provide local leaders with actionable solutions to make child care more affordable and accessible.

OUR DONORS

ALONG WITH CONTRACTS FOR TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND ADVISORY SERVICE, OUR WORK IS SUPPORTED BY FOUNDATIONS. AMONG THEM, IN 2024, WERE:

BARBARA LEE FAMILY FOUNDATION, CHARLES STEWART MOTT FOUNDATION, JPB (NOW FREEDOM TOGETHER FOUNDATION), KRESGE FOUNDATION, AND PARK FOUNDATION.

THANK YOU ALL!

“MIP has been invaluable in highlighting new ideas and fostering connections among cities, enabling me to meet and learn from fellow mayors and to bring valuable insights and effective strategies back to our community.”

— Mayor Victoria Woodards • Tacoma, WA

“The beauty of MIP is the intimacy that is fostered. It’s a place where mayors can be candid, vulnerable, and also leave feeling like they have the tools and relationships that can help get things done!”

— Mayor Barbara Bufaloe • Columbia, MO

“As a mayor, you are at the forefront of addressing complex challenges and creating opportunities for your community. The Mayors Innovation Project is an unparalleled platform to connect with fellow leaders, gain actionable insights, and explore innovative solutions that can transform your city. It is a chance to step away from [the] daily grind and engage in forward thinking discussions on pressing issues like sustainability, housing, public safety, and equity.”

— Mayor Katrina Thompson • Broadview, IL



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