Harvard Panel of Municipal Chief Innovation Officers
Responses given by Lea Deesing, Chief Innovation Officer, City of Riverside on September 26, 2015

1) What was the catalyst to creating the CIO role in your city? What were the underlying political, economic, social, etc., factors

Riverside is located in the inland Southern California region, which was hit hard during the last recession. We had a deteriorating infrastructure and high unemployment rate. In 2006, the leaders in Riverside embarked on a 1.6 billion dollar infrastructure investment, completing 30 years of improvements over five years. It was called Riverside renaissance and it led to a desire to become a smart city, knowing that intelligent, high-tech initiatives can lead to future economic prosperity.

To support this undertaking, the CIO role was created. By 2012, Riverside was deemed the most intelligent community in the world by ICF a think tank out of New York. And we continue to win awards based on our innovative programs.

We are now known as, "The City of Arts and Innovation." If you haven't been to Riverside in the past five or so years, you haven't been to Riverside.

2) What does innovation mean to your city now and how are you moving forward these priorities?

Innovation is really the sum of all the parts. In Riverside, there is so much positive momentum now; the region has recovered from the recession and is starting to really thrive again.

We have innovative programs popping up all over the city, including business incubators, tech boot camps, maker spaces and faires, hackathons, code to careers, a coding programs for kids, open data and transparent government initiatives, a world class digital inclusion program for low income families, a community leadership program called "Seizing our Destiny," a local farming initiative called "Grow Riverside," long night of arts and innovation, STEP conference, and technology advanced K-12 schools, along with our four colleges and universities which are growing and thriving.

It's a great time to focus on our human capital and empower the community through technology and education. With a million+ unfilled tech jobs expected by the year 2020, we are trying to align our city to become a mecca for the tech and other STEM-based industries.

We believe having high-speed broadband access is fundamental to this effort, so we are looking to expand our work in this area.

3) What does innovation in cities look like over the horizon - in five to ten years? How are you preparing for this future?

I think cities will offer more environmentally friendly, sustainable, diverse housing options for the millennials such as smart homes, tiny homes, shared gardens spaces, innovative and local food sources. This requires innovative thinking in city zoning and planning.

We'll see more connectivity with the Internet of things. Everything in your neighborhood will eventually have a computer chip from your mailbox to your car, hiking and bike trails, signals, and streetlights. But this requires good stewardship of big data.

Citizens will be more empowered to interact with their government in new ways with access to advanced performance dashboards, and mobile apps. This requires city leaders to work toward a transparent and inclusive government.

There will be more sharing of data between agencies and with the public, crowdsourcing the creative use of data to solve problems we may not even know exist yet. But this requires the foresight to promote open data policies.

And to end on a sobering note...Cybercrime will continue to be a dreadful problem and we'll see much more investment in cyber security. Last year, the FBI director said, there are two types of large companies those who have been hacked, and those who don't know they've been hacked. This problem requires a raised level of cybersecurity awareness and a lot of funding!

"It's easy to come up with new ideas; the hard part is letting go of what worked for you two years ago, but will soon be out of date."

— Roger von O-ech