National League of Cities 2025 City Summit – Key Takeaways & Recommendations

Submitted by Commissioner Jeremy Katzman

NLC Membership

Cities with populations **30,001–40,000**

- **FY25 Dues:** $3,834

- **FY26 Dues:** $3,949
  Membership offers access to national reports, research, and municipal best practices that can support Cooper City's strategic planning.

Program & Tour Takeaways

Salt Lake City Olympic Tour

Insights:

- Physical venues matter, but **people and culture drive the most lasting impact** for large-scale events.

- The city provides **free transportation for students participating in sports**, encouraging youth activity and accessibility.

- Olympic-style **community watch parties** strengthen civic pride and participation.

Potential Applications for Cooper City:

- Explore city-supported **transportation options** for youth sports programs.

- Host **large-scale community watch events** for major sporting or cultural events.

Trails & Parks Tour

Innovations Observed:

- **Story Trails:** Children's stories along trails curated by local librarians.

- **Peace Garden:** Plots maintained by cultural groups or countries to showcase diversity.

- **In-ground trash cans:** Deeper, less frequently serviced containers (Sybertech, Canada).

- Community garden budget: **Approx. $10,000/year**, with ability for supplemental fundraising.

Applications for Cooper City:

- Partner with local schools or the library for **story-based trail or playground enhancements**.

- Explore establishment of a **Peace Garden** to highlight cultural inclusion.

- Evaluate **in-ground waste systems** to reduce long-term maintenance costs.

Film Industry Tour

Observations:

- Utah maintains a **Film Store App**, enabling residents to register their homes as filming locations.

Recommendation:

- Propose that **Broward County** or the County Film Commission develop a similar platform to support local economic activity from film production.

AI in Local Government

Cities Leading in AI Adoption

- Vienna

- San Jose

- Philadelphia

NLC provides a comprehensive **AI implementation guide for cities**.

Urban Institute – Three Tiers of AI Integration

1. **Digital Assistance**

2. **Constituent Communication**

3. **Complex Problem Solving**

AI Opportunities for Cooper City

Operational & Administrative Uses

- Use AI to **summarize policies, ordinances, and laws** for public-facing communications and staff efficiency.

- Develop a **formal AI policy** for the city.

- Update procurement practices: require vendors to disclose **AI usage**; ensure contracts include safeguards and transparency requirements.

Public Safety & Emergency Services

- Use AI for **fire station call modeling**, leveraging call history to optimize response times.

- Predict and detect **water usage anomalies** (leaks or delinquency patterns).

Permitting & Development

- Implement AI tools that conduct **preliminary permit application reviews** and manage back-and-forth clarifications before staff intervention, improving turnaround time.

Public Works & Utilities

- AI-based **workforce and field-service scheduling** for utilities, maintenance, and other field operations.

Vendor Resources

- **GovAI Coalition:** Helps municipalities vet and select reliable AI vendors.

- **InnovateUS:** Emerging "Yelp-style" review platform for government technology solutions.

Tackling Extreme Heat – Adaptation Strategies

Key Recommendations:

- Invest in **EV charging infrastructure**.

- Transition city equipment fleets to **electric-powered models**.

- Provide **free transit passes** for youth and one parent to support sports participation and reduce heat exposure from walking/commuting.

- Use **economic arguments** (not environmental) when advocating for sustainability initiatives in politically mixed environments.

- Expand **bike lanes and trail networks** to encourage alternative transportation.

- Offer **incentives for environmentally friendly development**.

- Equip **police and fire stations with solar energy systems** to reduce heat-related power vulnerability.

Utility Improvements & Water Infrastructure

Funding Opportunities

- Consider creating a **special district** to fund large-scale water improvements.

- **WaterNow Alliance** (Cynthia Koehler) is a strong resource for funding and guidance.

Federal Funding Options

- **State Revolving Funds (SRF):** Low-interest EPA-supported financing.

- **WIFIA:** Larger-scale financing for major water infrastructure projects.

Methane & Waste Innovations

Case Study: Toledo

- Partnership with Northwest Renewables to convert **landfill methane into natural gas**.

Applications for Cooper City

- Evaluate opportunities to use methane generated from:

  - **Cooper City Water Plant operations**

  - **Landfill or organic waste streams**

- Consider sending **food waste to digesters**, prolonging landfill life and reducing emissions.

Summary – High-Priority Recommendations for Cooper City

1. **Develop a City AI Strategy** (policy, procurement, use cases).

2. **Evaluate AI for permitting, fire station optimization, and public works scheduling.**

3. **Explore methane-to-energy options and regional partnerships.**

4. **Advance trails, peace gardens, and library-collaboration concepts.**

5. **Investigate EV infrastructure, electric fleet transition, and solarization of stations.**

6. **Partner with Broward County to create a film-location registry/app.**

7. **Explore funding tools (SRF, WIFIA, WaterNow Alliance).**

8. **Plan community-wide Olympic/special event watch parties.**

Additional Summary: Civility & the Dignity Index

Civility in government emerged as a key theme at the 2025 NLC City Summit, most notably in a session anchored by **Anthony Shriver** (UNITE) on the **Dignity Index**, followed by a bipartisan governors' conversation on "Bridging Our Divides."

Highlights & Key Takeaways

1. **The Dignity Index**

   o The Dignity Index is an eight-point scale that measures *how* people talk to one another in disagreement — from an absence of dignity (1) to full recognition of inherent human worth (8). The Dignity Index+2campaignforkindness.com+2

   o Developed by **UNITE** (co-founded by Timothy Shriver), the Index is grounded in the belief that contempt fuels division, while dignity eases it. The Dignity Index

   o Core insights from implementing the Index include:

     ▪ **Electrifying effect**: people want to be trained, learn, and spread dignity. The Dignity Index

     ▪ **Mirror effect**: individuals use it to self-reflect on their own rhetoric. The Dignity Index

     ▪ **Agency effect**: people realize they can reduce contempt in their communication and communities. The Dignity Index

   o There is a practical guide for dignified conversations, such as *"be curious, not furious,"* pause when upset, listen to understand, and challenge ideas (not people). campaignforkindness.com

   o UNITE is scaling the movement — through training, curriculum, and even a proposed AI tool to flag contempt in writing. The Dignity Index+1

2. **Governors' Panel: "Bridging Our Divides"**

   o **Utah Gov. Spencer Cox** and **New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham** appeared together to model how civility and moral clarity can coexist in high-stakes politics. Deseret News+2KSL+2

   o Cox's "Disagree Better" initiative:

     ▪ Encourages *healthy conflict* — not sugarcoating disagreements, but engaging respectfully. Deseret News

- His simple but powerful tool: "Tell me more about why you feel this way." Deseret News

- He argues local leaders (you and your commission) are on the front lines — "you have the ability … to show people … we can actually work through our differences." [KSL](KSL)

  - Lujan Grisham emphasized empathy and relationships:

    - She said "it's really hard to be mad at someone that you like." Deseret News

    - She described marathon town halls where she listens until "every person has asked their question." Deseret News

  - On **political violence**, both governors made a plea:

    - Cox: "Trust is something you have to build early … speak with moral clarity … don't be afraid to call things what they are." Deseret News

    - Lujan Grisham: Leaders must "call out" dehumanizing rhetoric and center the suffering of real people. Deseret News

  - Their joint message: civility isn't weakness — it's courageous, and it's essential. Deseret News+1

Recommendations for Cooper City

Based on these insights, here are some actionable recommendations for our city leadership:

- **Adopt the Dignity Index internally**: Consider training for commissioners, city staff, and community leaders on the Index and its practices.

- **Incorporate dignity principles into public forums**: Use the conversation tools ("be curious," "listen to hear") in town halls, meetings, and public engagement.

- **Model "Disagree Better" in our polity**: When we deliberate contentious issues, we should explicitly frame discussions around respect, not just policy.

- **Promote civic resilience**: Encourage trust-building initiatives within Cooper City, especially among residents with polarized views.

- **Monitor civic discourse and behavior**: Use dignified communication as a metric in performance evaluations or community feedback mechanisms.