



THE UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF MAYORS

PRESS RELEASE

US Conference of Mayors Announces **Santa Fe is the 2028 Recipient "Geography of Genius" Innovation Award**

Date: May 7, 2028

Boston, Massachusetts

The US Council of Mayors announced today the City of Santa Fe with its prestigious "Geography of Genius" innovation award for the groundbreaking "Intelligent Acequia" civic data system. The award name is Inspired by Eric Weiner's book of the same name, which explores the intersection of brilliant minds and the environments that foster innovation and the genius that emerges. The Santa Fe "Intelligent Acequia" is an emergent genius from the unique blend of creative artists, scientists, technologists, and centuries of diverse cultural influences. Santa Fe, New Mexico, is a hub of complex systems research due to its proximity and historical connection to Los Alamos National Laboratory, where the Manhattan Project was developed. The Santa Fe Institute (SFI) was founded in 1984 to study complex systems and has become a leading center for interdisciplinary research in the field. Today, the technologies of nonlinear dynamics, chaos theory, and complexity science that were developed on the Manhattan Project are being applied to places like the actual Manhattan in New York and places around the globe to help ensure the safety and well-being of citizens in areas such as healthcare, finance, and the environment. Santa Fe's Acequia is a role model of converting swords to ploughshares or guns to butter.

Five years ago, the City of Santa Fe embarked on a radically different approach to civic data, drawing inspiration from the Santa Fe Institute's research on decentralization and collective intelligence. By implementing a decentralized data infrastructure that focused on self-sovereign identities and individual governance over their domains of data, the city successfully created an innovative system that realizes collective intelligence and action while maximizing individual privacy and freedom.

During the COVID-2025 outbreak, Santa Fe's Acequia proved remarkably effective in contact tracing that allowed for realtime tracking of the infection wavefront. By allowing for micro-targeted mitigations and shutdowns, the decentralized approach minimized disruptions to daily life and prevented the widespread community transmission often seen in other cities. China, which successfully used epidemic surveillance in 2019 for realtime contract tracing, is transitioning now to the Acequia as they edge computing at 3-4 exaflops coordinating citizen's phones in even a 4th-tier city of 500,000 is dwarfing their world's fastest supercomputer the TianHe-13 at 1.2 exaflops. Guo ShiDe, Chief Epidemiologist at the Academia Sinica Supercomputing Center observes. "Santa Fe's Acequia coordinates background worker threads on our citizen devices giving us massive leverage in simulating and generating new vaccines weekly given the rapid mutation of this 2025 variant. Finally we're experiencing '全世界无产者, 联合起来! (workers of the world unite)'. When government leaders ask to see our data centers. I point to their phones in their pockets. The data stores local and private and flows worker to worker. The centralized state has withered away to decentralization, just as Engles predicted."

Importantly, the system upholds privacy standards, enabling the sharing of essential information without compromising personal data. Eric Whitmore, who was instrumental in the launch of the decentralized data system, said, "Santa Fe's unique approach to civic data has enabled us to foster a strong sense of community while still preserving individual privacy and autonomy. We have open-sourced the platform and are offering it to the world as our contribution. It is now being utilized in 212 different cities and provinces, with overwhelmingly positive results."

Moreover, the collective intelligence aspect of the model allowed citizens to monitor and respond to natural disasters in real-time, such as wildfires. By pooling together private data like mobile phone photos and GPS position data from individual smartphones, residents could track wildfires and better prepare for their potential impact. This shared, yet private, rendering of the environment fostered a sense of community and resilience in the face of adversity. Chief Jane Martinez, City of Denver Fire Department, remarked, "The decentralized data system has significantly improved our ability to respond to emergencies. What is revolutionary is that the fire and smoke gets rendered from all these phones in realtime and yet none of the private pixels that aren't in common view are shared. I still think it's magic."

In addition to managing public health and natural disasters, Santa Fe's model has shown great promise in addressing public safety concerns, such as during an active shooter incident. The system enabled real-time intelligence gathering through the use of citizen cameras and microphones, without sacrificing privacy or involving the police. The early intervention by community members in Charlotte, North Carolina, combined with mental health support,

ultimately led to the de-escalation of the crisis. Charlotte Mayor Laura Smith expressed her gratitude "Incorporating Santa Fe's Acequia was literally a life-saver for us today."

The remarkable success of the "Intelligent Acequia" in managing public health crises, natural disasters, and public safety concerns, while upholding privacy standards, offers a blueprint for cities around the world to embrace a more sustainable, equitable, and innovative future. There are certain times in history when certain cities come on to the world stage with new paradigms. This award recognizes that it is Santa Fe at this time.

###

The United States Conference of Mayors is the official non-partisan organization of cities with populations of 30,000 or more. There are over 1,400 such cities in the country today. Each city is represented in the Conference by its chief elected official, the mayor. The Conference was born out of the Great Depression when in 1932, Detroit Mayor Frank Murphy invited the nation's mayors to his city to confront common problems caused by this dark time in our history.

Twenty-nine mayors gathered and, together, they called for Congress to provide relief, which Congress and the White House passed. That first meeting galvanized the mayors to formalize their conference, and in February 1933 they did so in Washington. As it is today, the Conference continues to be the leading voice of cities in our nation's capital. The Conference to this day is a nonpartisan forum where mayors engage directly with the President and Congress on the most pressing issues of the day.