

For several decades, The Theewaterskloof dam has provided more than half of the water supply for the four million inhabitants of Cape Town
Photo credit: Guardian graphic. Source: Bristol Water, Ruapehu District Council (NZ). Satellite photos: ESA/Sentinel 2 Reservoir outlines: NASA/Landsat 8, Guardian analysis

In the coming months, Innovations for Successful Societies will focus on insights for the United States from experiments in countries with fewer resources. Conversations about governance should truly be just that – conversations that go both ways.

Letter from Cape Town to Phoenix: Day Zero

First up: What Phoenix and other drought-affected cities in the southwestern part of the United States might learn from Cape Town, South Africa.

[“Keeping the Taps Running: How Cape Town Averted ‘Day Zero,’ 2017 – 2018”](#) shows how the city dealt with an unprecedented and wholly unforeseen third consecutive year of drought that threatened to cut off water to the city’s four million citizens. Local officials raced against time to avert “Day Zero”—the date on which they would have to shut off drinking water to most businesses and homes in the city. Key to the effort was a broad, multipronged information campaign that overcame skepticism and enlisted the support of a socially and economically diverse citizenry as well as private companies. Combined with other measures such as improving data management and upgrading technology, the strategy averted disaster. By the time the drought eased in 2018, Capetonians had cut their water usage by nearly 60% from 2015 levels. With each resident using little more than 50 liters per day, Cape Town achieved one of the lowest per capita water consumption rates of any major city in the world.

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