# Purpose

The purpose of this Talking Paper is to outline planning with innovateAFITC, a hackathon competition geared towards bringing government, industry, and academia together to solve some of the technological problems we as a nation face today. In addition, this paper will detail what happened from the idea’s inception to engagement with United States Air Force (USAF) representative and finally to where we stand now.

# Background

Since the ideas inception in 2015 today, Montgomery, Alabama has been making huge strides as Alabama’s first Internet Exchange and with this, lots of data and opportunities. HackMGM, a Code for America Brigade, has been working closely with local government officials to open data in an effort to promote transparency with government and its services for use and discovery for the local community to leverage and develop better services. The Montgomery Area Chamber of Commerce (MACC) is also tasked with enabling “Smart City” initiatives in order to make Montgomery, Alabama a “Smart City”. Additionally, Maxwell Air Force Base (MAFB) was promoted as the pilot for “Smart Base” initiatives that would help automate traditional base services such as security and e-911 services. As you can now see, the MACC’s “Smart City” initiatives, HackMGM’s mission, and MAFB’s “Smart Base” objective all align towards smarter services serving the community by leveraging technology and Internet of Things (IoT) devices.

Ms. Charisse Stokes, INSERT TITLE/POSITION, chaired the idea of hosting a hackathon for the community. To get this project started, she rallied Mr. Boyd Stephens, HackMGM’s former brigade captain and TSgt Joshua Hinshaw, HackMGM’s current brigade captain and computer programmer out of Gunter Annex to discuss feasibility of this endeavor. After much deliberation, the team decided to press forward with the project, and at the same time, align the hackathon with the Air Force Information Technology and Cyberpower Conference (AFITC).

Initially, a partnership with the USAF was not part of the plan. However, Mr. Heitkamp, an active AFCEAN and prominent member of the community, proposed collaborating with Mr. Marion and SAF/A6 on the event. During discussions, Mr. Marion expressed interest with what the planning committee had already formulated. Among his goals were to get Cyber Patriot inclusion into the event and to bolster the event as a tool for recruiting the best into the service.

# Where we stand

Through further discussion with SAF/A6, a number changes were made to the event to address the concerns of SAF/A6, the MACC, the AFLCMC/BES Staff Judge Advocate (SJA), and AFCEA. Due to the busy schedules of planning committee members involved, the geographical and functional separation of the planning committee members, and some miscommunications along the way, progress towards kicking off the event advertising campaign has been very slow. However, 90% of the event’s details have been addressed. Now, there are two items that need to be resolved:

1. MACC/AFCEA partnership with the USAF for the event
2. How judging will be accomplished and the level of involvement from prominent AF leaders in the event (judging, event participant engagement, etc.)

## USAF Partnership

At the conception of this idea in April 2017, those involved already new that time was of the essence to make this event a success. At the time partnership with the USAF in this endeavor was addressed, the planning members were excited at the idea and welcomed it with open arms. However, the planning members were not fully aware of what a partnership with a government entity would mean.

**Regulation**

Due to Joint Ethics Regulation application in a partnership with the USAF, the event is constrained in how it may acquire funding for the event. Additionally, coordination and approval from SAF/GC has contributed to the deceleration of event planning and approval.

**Funding the Event**

The initial funding plan was to have a self-sustaining hackathon, with industry as the primary source for fundraising. The funds would be necessary to sustain event items, such as the social event for participants, swag, and prizes. The idea moving forward would be to have a business sponsor a team that would have an employee participating.

The selling point with industry sponsorship is that those sponsoring teams would have a means to get their business name and brand in some spotlight at the event in the form of announcements, swag, and team shirts, just to name a few. If partnered with the USAF, the event is constrained by government policy, in turn removing the selling point for businesses to invest. AFCEA, the MACC, and AFLCMC/BES just do not have the funds necessary to facilitate the event.

**Time**

AFITC is now two months away. As stated earlier, the busy schedules of those involved in this event have been a contributing factor. Now with not just SAF/A6, but SAF/AA and SAF/GC involvement the event, the pace has grinded almost to a halt. With less than 60 days left, there is very little time to fundraise for the event through other means, and even less time to advertise and campaign for event participants.

**Branding**

Most of the committee members are agreeable to changing the name of the event from *innovateAFITC* to *Innovate AFITC Cyber Challenge*, the suggested name coming from SAF/AA. However, the comments stated in the paragraph below are solely the comments of TSgt Joshua Hinshaw, a military computer programmer from AFLCMC/BES and one of the primary drivers of this event:

*“The United States’ military and government are notorious for acronyms. Just about every single application I’ve encountered in my military service as a programmer is referred to by its acronym, because the names are just too long and drawn out. The overlap between common acronyms not just within but across the services and department of defense is insane. Some prime examples of this are LOGMOD (Logistics Module), DCAPES (Deliberate Crisis Action Planning and Execution System), and AFEMS-AIM (Air Force Equipment Management System-Automated Inventory Management). These acronyms and systems mean nothing to anyone but the community they serve.*

*The biggest goal of this event is to foster collaboration amongst our community: Industry, Students/Academia, and Government. A long, drawn-out name such as Innovate AFITC Cyber Challenge, or any other name with more than one or two words in it is not going to resonate with all the parties this event is trying to bring together. If the instead of being called the iPhone it was called the Apple Wireless Communications and Personal Computing System, or AWCPCS for short, would that catch your eye? Would you be enticed to buying such a product? In the end, participants and those exposed to the hackathon are going to call it one thing: Innovate AFITC.*

*Also, food for thought, Innovate AFITC Cyber Challenge spelled out is:*

*Innovate Air Force Information Technology and Cyberpower Conference Cyber Challenge*

## Judging & USAF Senior Leader Involvement

A divide and conquer strategy was proposed by SAF/A6. We are open to all opinions regarding the hackathon, we more than anyone want to see it succeed and return for future AFITCs to come. However, we do not feel that a divide and conquer strategy is the best option.

**Resources**

If we press with this strategy, more space will be necessary to facilitate concurrent judging, more judges, and additional diversity among judging teams. Room at AFITC is slim to none with the activities already lined up for the event, and space we’re soliciting in the local community is not large enough to accommodate, not to mention that the space is being offered for free to support the hackathon.

To sum this up, more resources will be necessary.

**Event Participation**

The number one reason why the planning committee is not on board with the divide and conquer approach is because judging a product, no matter what evaluation criteria was established prior to, is subjective and will differ from individual to individual. Having more than one panel of judge’s bolsters inconsistency in judging the participants. This event, is essentially nothing without the participants. The planning committee feels it would be doing a disservice to the participants, and the judging approach runs the risk of discouraging participants from competing in the following years. With this being the first event of its kind at AFITC and the desire to have it permeate AFITC in the following years, it is absolutely imperative that we get this right from the start.

# Conclusion

In the alternatives document provided, we firmly believe that Course of Action (COA) 1 will accomplish our goals and objectives, however with the partnership we are still constrained for funds.

AFCEA has a long history of contributions to the Montgomery, Alabama, and USAF communities. The MACC has an established history of contributions to the local community as well. The MAFB and Gunter Annex communities also have a longstanding history of volunteerism in the tri-county area. All three are organizations that promote and foster collaborative relationships for the betterment of society.

Partnership between AFCEA, the MACC, and the USAF for this hackathon for all intents and purposes is still a partnership, whether it’s documented for legal purposes or not. All three entities share the same goals in making this nation great. Whether an official partnership is pursued or not, we hope that the USAF will still continue to collaborate and participate in this event as they have just as much a part of Montgomery as the citizens and organizations that reside with it.