

CODE FOR AMERICA Code for America partners with local governments to foster civic innovation. Through its Fellowship program, Code for America provides an opportunity for the web generation to give back by embedding developers and designers in city governments to collaborate with municipal leaders. Founded in 2009, Code for America held its inaugural fellowship in 2011. This year Code for America has connected 26 fellows with eight cities nationally. Through the Accelerator program Code for America supports disruptive civic startups, and through the Brigade program Code for America encourages civic participation by organizing local groups of civic technologists to take action in their communities.

While private sector has evolved exponentially over the past decade adopting new technologies and new ways of working, local governments haven't adapted at the same rate. Code for America partners with local governments who are working to catch up. Developers and designers who are passionate about using their skills to give back, are embedded in local governments and collaborate with municipal leaders to create and implement web applications, and explore new approaches to local challenges.

In 2012, Code for America is connecting 26 fellows with eight cities: Austin, Chicago, Detroit, Honolulu, Macon, New Orleans, Philadelphia, and Santa Cruz.

Find out more: codeforamerica.org



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2011:

3 CITIES

19 FELLOWS

21 APPLICATIONS BUILT

72 DATASETS LIBERATED

81 CIVIC HACKATHONS

2012:

8 CITIES

26 FELLOWS

The Washington Post

CODE FOR AMERICA: AN ELEGANT SOLUTION TO GOVERNMENT IT PROBLEMS

BY VIVEK WADHWA | DECEMBER 18, 2011

Parents in Boston complained bitterly about the needlessly complex enrollment process for public schools. To sign up their children for school, parents were forced to navigate a Byzantine 28-page pamphlet seemingly designed to confuse. What's more, the process made it difficult for parents to make smart choices about schools based on criteria they considered important, such as proximity and user ratings.

But this year, Joel Mahoney, a Code for America fellow taking a break from a tech career as a chief technology officer and entrepreneur, saw the problem, mapped out a solution and wrote a Web application, Discover BPS, that has a simple, easy-to-use interface and includes all manner of sorting capabilities.

He did this in two months, by himself.

Under normal circumstances, getting something such as that done in the Boston government would take two years, between requests for proposals, procurement rules and bidding processes. But Mahoney's background set him apart, and he was already "procured" by the city. This meant that as soon as the office of Mayor Thomas M. Menino (D) explained the problem to Mahoney, he could get to work, talking to parents and building a prototype. The Boston city government saved tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of dollars in costs for private contractors or man-hours for their own software developers. Most important, the problem was quickly solved to the satisfaction of all parties.

Code for America is the technology world's equivalent of the Peace Corps or Teach for America. The premise is simple and elegant. America's cities need technology help. State, federal and local governments spend hundreds of billions of dollars each year on IT systems and solutions. But a significant percentage of this money is wasted fighting red tape, jumping through bureaucratic hoops or paying for poor execution by legacy government contractors who manage to drag out simple projects and turn them into money pits.

Code for America, a nonprofit group started by Jennifer Pahlka, who formerly ran the Gov 2.0 and Web 2.0 technology shows for conference and publication giant UBM TechWeb, offers an alternative to the old, broken path of government IT. Young technophiles from Google and Microsoft apply to spend a year of their time working on problems they discover as on-site fellows in cities across the country. They bring fresh blood to the solution process, deliver agile coding and software development skills, and frequently offer new perspectives on the latest technology – something that is often sorely lacking from municipal government IT programs. This is a win-win for cities that need help and for technologists that want to give back and contribute to lower government costs and the delivery of improved government service.

Code for America matches fellows with cities in the program, publicizes their efforts, and monitors their progress. The cities get highly skilled coders – who might make six-figure salaries in the private sector – for free. The citizens get improved government services.

But the benefits go beyond the delivery of a particular project. The code for all projects is open source and made available to any city or government entity. This means state and local governments gain a growing repository of well-written, modern code that, in many cases, will directly address specific programmatic needs common to governments providing services to the public. This is already proving to be a great way to solve problems quickly and at minimal cost.

For example, in Boston, one of three cities in the program last year, another fellow, Erik Michaels-Ober, started thinking about the city's several thousand fire hydrants, which have to be dug out of the snow every winter. Michaels-Ober believed that residents living near the hydrants might be willing to dig them out. So he crafted a simple Web application to encourage Bostonians to claim a hydrant using a simple map interface on their desktop

or mobile browser. To drive usage, he added game dynamics, allowing citizens to name their hydrants or “steal” other players’ hydrants if they failed to dig them out in a timely fashion. The “crowd-sourced” game, Adopt-a-Hydrant, has saved Bostonians a significant amount of government spending and made the city a safer place.

Eight months later and nearly 6,000 miles away, the City of Honolulu IT director, Forest Frizzell, found the Adopt-a-Hydrant project on Code for America’s public code repository. He thought the app could quickly be rescripted to encourage Honolulu residents to maintain the tsunami sirens on the beach. These sirens are rendered inoperable when thieves steal the batteries. Instead of increasing the frequency of city maintenance crews

monitoring, which would raise costs to the city, Frizzell is letting any citizen with a smartphone or a Web browser check for batteries and record their findings. In an era of diminished state and local taxes, it might, indeed, take a village – and an army of benevolent coders – to keep the lights on, the potholes patched, the sirens blaring and the hydrants flowing.

Code for America is expanding to eight cities in 2012. Let’s hope this expansion foretells a government technology revolution that is long overdue. The status quo of bloated, inefficient technology management for government is no longer acceptable.

Code for America: An elegant solution for government IT problems



View Photo Gallery — Cracking the government code: The non-profit Code for America gives programmers an opportunity to lend their expertise to state and local governments. The effort has resulted in applications that have solved some nagging and pressing problems.

THE HUFFINGTON POST

2011'S ULTIMATE GAME CHANGERS: JENNIFER PAHLKA

BY ARIANA HUFFINGTON | OCTOBER 21, 2011

Last month we announced HuffPost's 2011 Game Changers -- 100 innovators, visionaries, and leaders who are changing the way we look at the world and the way we live in it. And we asked you to weigh in on who the Ultimate Game Changer is in each of our 12 categories: Politics, Green, Media, Style, Food/Travel, Entertainment, Culture, Business/Technology, Sports, World, Impact/Education, and Healthy Living.

The response was tremendous. Thank you! Now it's time to reveal your picks for the Ultimate 12.

They are an eclectic mix of those accustomed to the spotlight and those who have been working under the radar.

So click through the slideshow below to see who the HuffPost community selected as the Ultimate Game Changers.

And congratulations again to all 100 of our 2011 Game Changers. There has seldom been a moment in history in which such people have been more essential. If we're going to overcome the many problems the world is facing, we are going to need all the Game Changers we can find. And those of us in the media will have to do a better job of turning the spotlight on those who are charting the way forward, and inspiring others in their communities to follow suit.

P.S. Check out these videos and photos from last week's Game Changers event -- from the red carpet to the podium and all around the party.

Business and Tech: Jennifer Pahlka

"It's like a Teach for America for geeks." That's how founder and executive director Jennifer Pahlka describes Code for America, which fields city projects that need web based solutions, and unites government organizations with the open source tech community. The results have been ingenious and vast -- from

Adopt a Hydrant, where individuals sign up to keep a hydrant clear of snow and debris so that firefighters can better access them in emergencies, to ClassTalk, which, according to the Code for America website, "empowers teachers to communicate instantly with their classes through SMS and email, keeping school subjects and class deadlines at the top of a student's mind."

She said it: "There is a certain generation who have grown up being able to mash up, to tinker with, every system they've ever encountered," she said, speaking on the phone from her Bay Area office. "So they are meeting their relationship with government in a new way, with a new assumption: We can fix it. It really signals a new relationship between government and the technology community, but it is also about the government being useful to you in your daily life and engaging you in your daily life."





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MAYOR MENINO INVITES RESIDENTS TO “ADOPT-A-HYDRANT” THIS WINTER

NEW WEBSITE ENCOURAGES VOLUNTEERS TO HELP THE FIRE DEPARTMENT AND THEIR NEIGHBORS BY SHOVELING OUT SNOWED-IN HYDRANTS AFTER SNOWSTORMS

From shoveling out cars to building snowmen, Boston residents know that the challenges and joys of winter are best handled when people work together. Today, Mayor Thomas M. Menino launched the Adopt-A-Hydrant program, a first-of-its-kind effort, designed to tap into this community spirit. The program provides a website (boston.adoptahydrant.org) where residents can volunteer to shovel out specific hydrants in their neighborhoods.

“Whether you are coaching little league or helping to maintain a park, volunteers provide the foundation for strong neighborhoods in Boston,” said Mayor Thomas M. Menino. “The Adopt-A-Hydrant program is the newest opportunity for our residents to show the great sense of volunteerism that shines in Boston all year, and it’s a great example of how we can use technology to build community and keep neighborhoods safe.”

The Boston Fire Department will continue to lead the effort to shovel out the City’s hydrants. Given, however, that there are more than 13,000 hydrants in the City, volunteers can help ensure that those hydrants are cleared of snow even faster. Last year, the Boston Fire Department responded to 5,653 fires.

“While our firefighters will always be the City’s first and last line of defense, Adopt-A-Hydrant provides an easy way for residents interested in lending a hand to improve neighborhood safety,” said Boston Fire Commissioner Rod Fraser. “As the nation’s first fire department, we are always looking for innovative ways to improve fire prevention and response.”

Adopt-A-Hydrant is the most recent addition in the City’s portfolio of volunteer programs. Other signature volunteer programs include Boston Shines, which supports local groups conducting neighborhood clean-ups; the Boston Medical Reserve Corps, which facilitates medical professionals assisting in public health emergencies; and the Community Emergency Response Team program, which trains residents to help neighborhoods weather other emergencies.

To adopt one of the 13,000 public hydrants, residents go to the website, enter an address, and choose the hydrant(s) they would like to volunteer to shovel out from the selected geographic area. Adopters, who have the opportunity to name their adopted hydrants, will be reminded during winter snowstorms of appropriate snow shoveling protocols.

“Informed and engaged residents are key to the City’s ability to respond to any emergency – big or small,” said Don McGough, the City’s Director of Emergency Management. “Adopt-A-Hydrant offers a new format for engaging residents in the wake of some of our toughest storms.”

The Adopt-A-Hydrant application was developed by Erik Michaels-Ober, a Code for America fellow, who served with the City of Boston in 2011. The City is piloting the application this year. If successful, the City will explore how this application could be used to encourage adoption of other streetscape features, such as catch basins or trees. The app also is available for other places to use and, to-date, three cities – Chicago, Honolulu, and Buenos Aires – already have all expressed an interest in adapting it for use by their residents.

“We were pleased to be one of the first cities to partner with Code for America and excited about the possibility of Adopt-A-Hydrant,” said Bill Oates, Boston’s Chief Information Officer. “The innovative applications that came from this partnership are allowing us to provide new services to Boston residents and share new software and ideas with other cities.”

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Adopt A Hydrant is a project of the Mayor’s Office of New Urban Mechanics and the Boston Fire Department. Mayor Menino’s Office of New Urban Mechanics focuses on piloting transformative City services that spark civic engagement and leverage new technology.

GOOD

PART PEACE CORPS, PART VENTURE CAPITAL: CODE FOR AMERICA'S PLAN FOR PUBLIC INNOVATION

BY ALEX GOLDMARK | MAY 11, 2012

Solving Uncle Sam's tech dilemmas is big business, but if your company wants a government contract, you'll need to understand the bureaucratic beast—both to secure the deal and deliver on it. It helps if you've got public-sector experience, and ideally a few close friends still inside signing the contracts.

That can be major handicap for young companies and entrepreneurs who lack connections but still want to bring game-changing ideas into the civic space. Code For America hopes to change that dynamic by sparking civic startups and giving them a map to navigate the bureaucracy. The group is piloting a business accelerator program (applications close June 1) to help small businesses with big ideas get into public service. The potential payoff is huge. Government information technology spending is estimated to be a \$174 billion market in 2014.

"The scrappy entrepreneur who's trying to change something in the world generally doesn't understand how government works," says Jennifer Pahlka, founder of CFA. "If they want to sell to government they're going to need a lot of help."

CfA launched in 2009 as what Pahlka calls a "Peace Corps for geeks." It matches up hackers and programmers with government agencies to work on difficult data problems for a year at a time. In the first two classes of fellows, CfA participants built a real-time system for Philadelphia residents to contribute to the city's strategic plan with their cell phones. In Santa Cruz, California, they've helped streamline the process for starting a business. There are other projects in a dozen cities.

Sometimes these projects result in new software products that require someone to manage them indefinitely—a whole new business, or more precisely, what Pahlka calls a "civic startup."

"It's any company that is either going to work with government, or without government, but to change the social landscape through technology," she says.

To cultivate these civic startups and help them compete against behemoth contractors, CfA is taking a page from venture capital accelerator programs like Y Combinator, which help entrepreneurs build their skills and tap into human capital networks to find funding and potential collaborators.

CfA will mix that business development model with the Peace Corps-style fellowships to create a social enterprise aimed at building a 21st-century government. "If you look at the last 15 to 20 years, the biggest changes we've seen in how society works have come from disruptive new businesses," Pahlka says.

CfA will choose five companies for a four-month training program on how to work with, or within, the public sector; improve their business models; and build connections to tap the expertise of CFA's tech advisors. With more than 50 applications already submitted, the CFA accelerator plans to take on more than five companies at a time.

The lucky civic-minded geeks chosen will receive \$25,000 to grow their business, along with the training and entree to Uncle Sam's IT procurement experts. The hope is to build an enlarged ecosystem of smaller, more nimble startups to keep entrenched IT contractors on their toes, taxpayer money better spent, and democracy better served.



CELEBRATING OUR VETERANS WITH “APPS FOR HEROES”

POSTED BY ANEESH CHOPRA AND PETER LEVIN ON JANUARY 23, 2012 AT 09:21 AM ES

Last Wednesday, we joined Dr. Jill Biden at the Code for America headquarters, a non-profit startup that has attracted dozens of civic-minded software developers spending a year building new products and services – powered, in part, by open government data – to improve the lives of everyday Americans.

Dr. Biden celebrated the convening efforts of Code and 10 apps developed by the private sector to improve the employment prospects for our Nation's heroes – from apps that help veterans build new skills or a professional network, to a personalized list of open job postings. We observed the results of LinkedIn's "Veterans Hackday" – two of the 44 apps built over a weekend; a collaboration between two tech companies that had never worked together before – Jibe and KMS Software – to deliver an almost-paperless approach to qualify for eligible tax credits; and the impressive work of a veteran entrepreneur, Fidelis, focused on the military to civilian transition.

We saw these and other "Apps for Heroes" because Code for America made a commitment last August in response to the President's call to action. We joined Code on this mission and engaged a broader voluntary collaborative of tech firms already active in the employment and training online market. They didn't ask us for money. Rather, we brainstormed how government data, if released in a people-and-computer-friendly format, could serve as "rocket fuel" for their apps.

And then we went to work.

Inspired by President Obama's Open Government Initiative and guided by the U.S. National Action Plan, we identified at least three areas where we might open up data that had previously been either in an inaccessible format, organized in a fragmented way, or largely unknown to the developer community:

Military Service Information: Veterans today collect a form – the DD-214 – that captures their military "resume"; while it can be electronically accessed, the data within the form is protected and in a form that isn't accessible for a computer to read. Building on the momentum of VA's initiative, Dr. Levin expanded their "Blue Button" service – which enables a veteran to safely and securely download their personal health data in computer-friendly form – to include a veteran's service history, training, and credentials. Launched just in the beginning of December, over 60,000 veterans have already downloaded a "Blue Button" file that can be shared with the products and service as they see fit, like the apps for heroes we saw last week.

Military Skills Translator: The Department of Labor actively supports a non-profit, the O*Net center, to maintain a growing portfolio of tools and data sets that are freely available to developers or anyone for that matter. The problem was that very few of the developers we engaged over the past several months were even aware of this resource. When we showed them what we had they immediately went to work on "translating" military experience into skills that are relevant for their existing products and services.

Job Postings from Employers Seeking Veterans: President Obama launched the "Veterans Job Bank" last November, which provides access to hundreds of thousands of job postings from employers actively committed to hiring veterans. Built on an open standard, the "JobPosting" schema – endorsed by a coalition of search engines (Google, Microsoft, Yahoo) through the schema.org community – empowers any employer to ensure its job postings are discoverable by the Job Bank. The big idea is that instead of requiring every employer to update a centralized database, we can dynamically "search" for veteran-committed jobs. Its faster, cheaper, and more reliable way to connect employers to talent. The Job Bank itself is accessible at the National Resource Directory and its search widget, built in an effort to support developers has offered an API that delivers search results straight to the app.

Finally, I thought to share the power of Open Innovation @ Internet speed. At a Summer Jobs + event last Tuesday, Twilio CEO, Jeff Lawson challenged the Twilio developer community to build an "App for Heroes." In about an hour – from concept to go-live – developer Tony Webster built HeroJobs.org, a text messaging app that sends job alerts to veterans every morning based on their preferences, experience, and zip code.

We were humbled and honored that so many innovative firms volunteered their time and effort to incorporate these – and other open government data sets – as an important ingredient for their innovate employment or training support service. Our visit inspired us to push even harder to release government data, celebrate its use, and to engage our veterans directly to ensure they have the support they need in this important life transition.

Aneesh Chopra is U.S. Chief Technology Officer and Peter Levin is Chief Technology Officer and Senior Advisor to the Secretary, Department of Veterans Affairs.

the Atlantic

TECHIES EMBED IN CITY HALL

BY NATE BERG | OCTOBER 21, 2011

The increasingly wired world has inevitably met the notoriously slow-moving gears of city government. City websites, apps and online tools are becoming an integral part of local government. Or at least they're starting to. While some cities like San Francisco and New York have been leaders in developing a software side of the city, others simply don't have the time or resources to upgrade to Government 2.0. A program entering its second year is on a mission to help those cities get there, and so far it has produced some promising results.

Code for America connects selected fellows with cities that need their services. It's based on the Teach for America model, where recent graduates are sent to school districts with few resources. Like underperforming schools, there are plenty of cities that can use all the help they can get.

In its first year, the program has built a variety of applications and tools for cities, including a website that helps Boston parents find schools for their kids, an app that calculates the solar potential of rooftops, and tools that help residents interact with city 311 systems for non-emergency services.

Code for America just announced the next group of focus cities that will receive teams of fellows. For 2012, the organization has upped its load to eight cities. From a pool of more than 20 applicants, the selected cities are Austin, Chicago, Detroit, Honolulu, New Orleans, Santa Cruz, and Macon, Georgia. Philadelphia will also spend a second year in the program.

Unlike the rest of the cities in the program, Macon represents a new approach for the program, mainly because the city of 91,000 has different needs than a Philadelphia or Boston.

"Comparatively, we're teeny tiny," says Amanda Deaton, the project lead for the city of Macon.

And that may be why a program like this is needed there so much. Deaton says her city lacks the resources to build some of the more basic websites and tools that could help improve the way the city works for its citizens. She says a big issue in Macon is citizen engagement.

"There are some people in the community that don't have any

interaction with their government," says Deaton. "An engaged public is a public that takes ownership of their community and makes their community a better place."

She's hoping the way the public interacts with the city – and how the city responds to the needs of citizens – will be improved by the program. She says the current system lets both sides down.

"Yes, you can call customer service, but there's no real way to follow up to make sure something gets done. If it does, hooray, if it doesn't it doesn't," Deaton says. "We need better ways for the community to communicate with us, and also to hold us accountable."

The work will begin when teams of three fellows arrive in host cities in February. But before they arrive, they'll spend their first month preparing to work in the unique and sometimes challenging field of local government. Code for America aims to help the programmers and developers and marketers involved understand the culture of city government, giving them a crash course on how to navigate the city, according to Alissa Black, government relations director. She says a big part of the training is simply encouraging the fellows to be observant of how their cities work and to listen to their needs.

"What we want to do is base our work on user feedback," Black says. "That means going into the cities, talking with officials, meeting with different departments and gathering as much information as the fellows can about what's going on."

But, she says after eight years of experience working in local government, it can be difficult to get officials to open up about the problems they face.

"Cities have a really hard time one, admitting that they need help, and two, articulating that problem to an audience," says Black.

But with 2011's cities, Black and the Code for America fellows have been able to develop communication channels with their host cities, and to help break down some of the silos that tend

to keep co-dependent parts of local governments apart.

While the goal for each host city is to improve local problems, Code for America is also looking beyond borders. They specifically look for cities with what Black calls repeatable problems.

"When you address one city's problem, you can imagine you're solving another city's problem, too," says Black.

And that's already occurring. Black points to one project developed for Boston that gets locals to "adopt" fire hydrants to make sure they are visible to firefighters after heavy snows. She says officials in Honolulu have adopted a similar program to get locals to look out for and maintain tsunami sirens.

"The functionality can cross jurisdictions," says Black. "That's what we're looking for."

Cities pay to be involved in the program, though the fees are apparently much less than those charged by commercial vendors. Some are able to participate through foundation support, like

Macon, whose roughly \$300,000 in program fees are handled by the Knight Foundation.

For Deaton, the potential impact of the program on the city is exciting. She says the potential of Code for America can create a sea-change in Macon, where public engagement in local government is low. Engagement, she says, but also fulfillment.

She has a lot of ideas about how the incoming fellows will be able to help and change the city, but she also wants to defer to their judgment and technological expertise.

"We don't want to tell them what to work on," Deaton says.

"We're going to let them come here, let them see what we have and let them tell us where they think they can make the biggest impact."

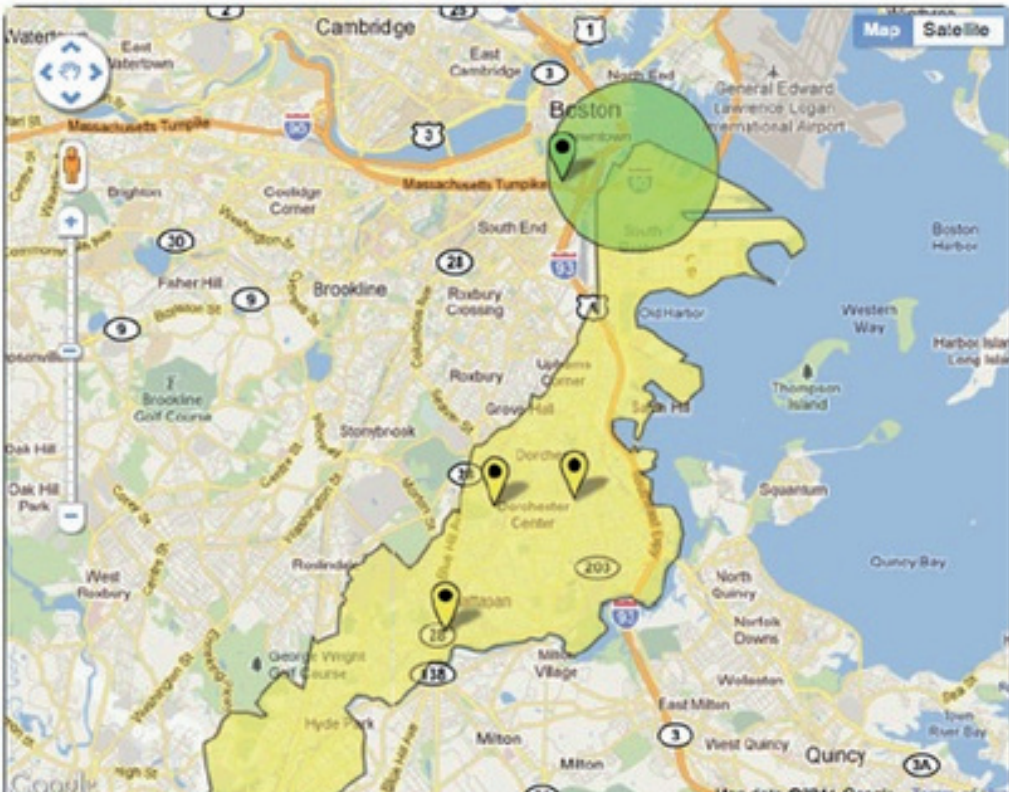
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