**NNIPCamp Atlanta, May 10, 4:15-5:15**

**Session 2 –**

**Led by Olivia Arena (Urban) and Veronica Young (Code for America)**

**Notes by Dean Obermark (Urban)**

**Attendance:**

* Elizabeth Grossman (Microsoft), Kevin Miller (Microsoft), Katherine Hillenbrand (Ash Center), Shea Swauger (Auraria Library, UC Denver), Ryan Ferriman (Denver), Aaron Schill (Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission), Elizabeth Reynoso (Living Cities), Rebecca Hefner (Charlotte)

**Opening intros. and why we’re here**

* Aaron: Using hackathon to test a regional data hub that contains a huge diversity of data
* Katherine: Manages network of cities chief data officers
* Ryan: In charge of webtools, constantly tinkering and getting folks to work together
* Shea: We’re exploring setting up a regional GIS data portal for the front range. Interested in wifi access and internet access.
* Veronica: Works with brigade program at Code for America. Interested in ways for expanding partnerships. Use cases are great examples of combining volunteer work with existing organizations.
* Elizabeth G: Around 4 years of participating in city civic tech. ecosystem. Interested in the immense impact of civic tech. and the challenge of sustainability. How does that become a part of the civic tech. use Innovation is great but impact requires sustainability and scale.
* Elizabeth R: Background in city government. Wants to increase capacity and understand how collaboration can be most useful.

**Veronica Gives CFA Background and Discussion**

* CFA’s core mission is for government services to be accessible to folks through technology. An example is creating portals where you can apply for government services. There are many other examples. The projects in the partnership are great examples, too. The hope is that we don’t need CFA in the future because government will catchup on tech. We want our communities to be diverse and thriving and the CFA brigade program started with just nine cities and 13 volunteers. Now it’s grown immensely. It’s a really large network. Our goal is to use network and leverage knowledge and talent. Work with partners to create applications and projects that are sustainable that are providing impact within local communities. The hope is gov. adopts these projects. Civic tech. means different things to different people. The hope is that civic tech. is eventually incorporated into government.
* What is a brigade? A brigade is a volunteer chapter. They are started by people in communities who raise hand. They become part of the CFA network. They have full autonomy on projects. Really CFA and Veronica’s role is to provide resources and a platform. What’s worked on is determined by brigades themselves. Size and work really vary. Their relationships with local gov. also vary.
* Olivia: I went to brigade congress in fall. People are so involved. I went into rooms where it was all unconference. How do we create a solution to these larger issues? As well as capacity in orgs. I realized I came at things way differently as a researcher. You do a few qualitative interviews and report back whereas they do frontend user research. I think that’s a place where NNIP partners can find common ground. Urban is a large org. where a lot needs to happen to engage with community members.
* Veronica: One buzzword that’s starting to be incorporated in production of ways to access services is user-centered design. Where we start is with somebody who is in the community and we go through that mapping out of current processes. Then we find ways to make it easier for the person who’s doing that. How can we make that easier and more accessible? We think that the technology is about the people.
* Elizabeth G: One of the things in the middle of the spectrum is around the processes in civic user testing groups. Thinking about design decisions and understanding the user. Civic user testing (CUT) groups offer a structured way for users to provide feedback on something like a new website or kiosks in Chicago. There’s a spectrum of these interactions and how they can be structured. [There’s a CUT group model that’s fully documented.](http://www.cutgroupbook.org/)
* Aaron: We don’t have a code for America brigade. What I’ve found is at my role in the regional council—we’re a nonprofit and data aggregator for the region—In planning for this hackathon, is that our role can be helpful in leading use case development. This data hub will house unknown data. We can tell how we work with community level data all the time. We can help guide the brainstorming process around what different members of the community would use and how they would use it. In 15 minutes, we came up with 40 different use cases, distilled to 3, and are building in really detailed features. That’s something the technical team couldn’t do. The 3 we chose is how to connect food insecurity with resources, there’s one about how to help people who are 55+ access resources, and how do we use real-time data to make intersections and traffic issues safer. I think folks who look at community data all the time have specific things and know here’s what we think you should be looking at.
* Veronica: What’s the thought process on how folks implement?
* Aaron: That’s what we’ll learn at the hackathon and test use cases. Another key component is bringing in stakeholders from different groups. We recognize that we don’t know the issues in a way that we’ve lived them. We might have people from neighborhoods or foodbanks come in and talk about what the tool would need to be to be useful. Connecting to those groups is part of our role.

**What are other civic tech. resources outside of CFA?**

* Elizabeth G: Another organization that has a similar model is [DataKind](http://www.datakind.org/).
* Elizabeth R: two points. In our collaborative, not every city had a CFA partner. The goal was that we would start there but not that brigades would necessarily accept it or want to partner. In our lessons, we’ve tried to take out the branded stuff we’ve done. Are you a data intermediary? Are you a tech. group? What we found is how many groups could be working in this space.
* Elizabeth G: The cultural differences can be sort of tough to navigate.
* Elizabeth R: being able to learn from different groups and that you’re getting domain expertise from community is important to the groups.
* Aaron: Having practical experience working with data partners all the time and working with diverse large sensitive data sets, I found that several of us were in NNIP-like roles or organizations and I found we had to do a lot of advising to the technical build team. Initially they started to approach these partners and just ask for all their data. We had to have some conversations about how to develop data relationships.
* Shae: I’m a librarian and public libraries can be really good. They have basic tech. infrastructure and a lot are starting to add maker labs. Academic libraries might have even better access. That’s usually free, too. We don’t typically charge for those types of services.
* Veronica: A lot of brigades meet out of libraries. Another opportunity is that network leveraging within your own community. We encourage finding nonprofits who do work in an area where you’d like to work. Find an area and then attend meetings and make connections with nonprofits. There’s always something that’s already existing. There are always folks who know about issues. Being able to make those connections is really helpful.
* Ryan: We have a data group to try to get everyone communicating. Our first informal get together had a rep from CFA and there was a lot of interest and it was reciprocal. Coders want to give back to the community. So do data people.
* Veronica: one thing I’d like to point out is that among a lot of the brigades some of the most popular projects use maps. One the Philadelphia projects is mapping healthy food. I see a lot of strong ties with the mapping work in data and making information accessible.

**Events, Volunteerism, and Sustainability**

* Aaron: Are brigades event driven?
* Veronica: I’d say the events are the vehicle for the work. The end goal is the actual product. A hackathon is a way to work on those projects. Most brigades have weekly or biweekly meetings.
* Aaron: One of the things we’re facing is that we’ve had a 5-month buildup. We’ve had great response with 120 users in group. But come next week there’s a big culmination and our concern is that following that event we’ll have drop off. We’ve asked for a lot of time commitment. I’m curious how you think about ongoing volunteer work. We’re trying to figure out what’s reasonable. Any suggestions?
* Veronica: I think the nature of volunteerism has that problem. I think that setting your goals differently can affect your ability to harness people’s time and work. Maybe if your goal is a step in a process vs. an event it could incentivize folks differently. Framing can affect where folks are in terms of how they put their time forward. A lot of projects take at least a year or so for completion. A lot of folks take a ton of time out of their lives. We’re trying to work on how folks can comfortably take time out of their lives. We’ve rebooted the CFA fellowship to specifically work with brigade members. The way that we’re doing it in the form of a fellowship. My sense is that being able to have folks get compensated can bring projects to fruition. A lot of times a cool project is made but getting people to use it is different. That involves marketing and partnership. Having tangible goals can help people get to the finish line.
* Elizabeth R: We specifically didn’t address volunteers in our final lessons. When we started, we went to our network and everybody said they do other stuff and it’s not directly that their job. We realized that it’s everybody’s job. If all the competencies rely on just one sector, that’s not sustainable. And how do we get investment into existing staff. Do we do academies within government? And also accept that tech. folks might move to another sector. For other sectors, how do we get them to realize they need to invest in it too? Rebecca, what’s it like to work with partners who aren’t under contract?
* Rebecca: I think what gets underestimated is how much time local gov. spends on this too. One of the challenges we had is just finding a sweet spot where we don’t have to spend 40 hours to put data together and another 40 cleaning. Only a few projects actually have clean data and a volunteer ready to go. We invest a lot of time to get things ready for a project to take hold. That time can get easily lost. What I’m interested in is how do we convince governments to make these investments? There’s an issue of capacity and investment that we haven’t answered well.
* Aaron: The city of Columbus has staff on this grant and there need to be staff people who drive process and hold people together in targeted ways. Once we do the hackathon, we’re just moving into a phase with no foreseeable end and that’s scary.
* Rebecca: having dedicated capacity is important. People within government are also stretched so thin. They’re almost volunteering how much the folks in the brigade are.
* Aaron: It can mean you’re neglecting your actual job.
* Elizabeth R: We try to tell people they can multi-solve. Look at chief sustainability officers. That was a field that didn’t exist. We need something like that happening here. How does everybody realize that these are the tool and competencies we need but that it’s also not siloed. The work continues past 9 to 5. How do we look at other successful ways to institutionalize priorities? And make it a priority to invest.
* Elizabeth G: you bring up sustainability but often those officers have a mission and political support but they don’t have authority or budgets. I think one lesson is to look at how people in CIO positions do use their roles and staff in ways that lead to a capability that links up to an existing budget. Looking at case studies of civic tech., a key factor for success was what budget authorities could help continue the work. When we get involved in projects, I ask who’s the stakeholder and what could they do when you’re done. Sometimes the grant helps for a few years, and you can build a lot of goodwill and evidence of impact in that time.
* Veronica: Piggybacking on evidence of impact, the thought at CFA is that if we can prove impact and cost savings then that will eventually evolve the way the system is done now. The reality is that this work is being done through vendors already. Maybe not the exact same way, but there are vendors who are hired. If we’re able to have successes and show things are cheaper, then that will inspire government to bring on folks where it is their fulltime job.
* Elizabeth G: or change how you relate to the vendor. This isn’t my business hat, but it goes back to sustainability. For impact to be ongoing, you need to change the process of what cities require of vendors. What are the levers that we have to change that process?
* Olivia: Pushing to measurable impact, in the [MySociety report](https://www.mysociety.org/2017/05/16/civic-tech-cities-researching-us-government-inhouse-technologies/), it found that the tech. embedded in government still led to the same people engaging with government.
* Elizabeth: One of the case studies was explicitly about citizen engagement. And it showed that the digital divide exists and persists. But the idea that tech is a substitute for engagement is something they wanted to make sure people didn’t takeaway.
* Aaron: Our tool could exacerbate inequalities and we’ve been having those conversations. One of the goals is to create equity. We don’t know answer to question but it’s a very real challenge.
* Ryan: touching on that topic, Colorado secretary of state does [Go Code Colorado](http://gocode.colorado.gov/). It’s a competition once a year. It helps cities come up with a pitch for their open data portal. It’s an interesting chance for them to see what might happen if you turn people loose. The cringeworthy example is that the tool would grab demographic data to help salespeople know who you are before they call you. The judges were really hesitant about that.
* Aaron: Our concern is not so much nefarious use but giving more resources to people who don’t need them.
* Elizabeth G: do you have a training and capacity-building program?
* Aaron: We’re not a part of that necessarily. But it’s a broader regional strategy. Still the amount of data and immediacy is especially challenging. It’s like an open data site with exacerbated issues.
* Veronica: I wanted to say that in terms of training and accessibility it can help combat that. Another method we like to use is texting. It’s more accessible than the internet for a lot of folks. For services, we use text a lot. One of CFA’s internal products is called [client comm](https://www.codeforamerica.org/services/clientcomm). and it’s a way for parole officers to communicate with clients. It helps give parole officers and easy way to reach people.

**Licensing**

* Shea: For the things being created, what kind of tools do you use for licensing?
* Ryan: I know with the Colorado go code if you won the competition, the state basically bought your product. I guess that’s how they justify the prize money at the end. They’ve now gone to a different model where you own what you created. The state is now hoping that you continue to run with it.
* Rebecca: I can echo it’s a struggle for us. We’ve indicated through our data policy pieces that we could license our data under creative commons. Our city attorney was like what does that mean?
* Aaron: On the software side, we usually use creative commons. For this grant the goal is for the operating system to become open to all other cities. The data question is tough. A lot of our local governments are questioning how far to go with that. Now they have businesses that are tying into some traffic systems and trying to figure out how to capture the public investment that goes into those systems. Some local policymakers want to look at it for revenue generation for the city and some just want to recover investment.
* Shea: Who’s the owner of the CFA prodcuts?
* Veronica: CFA owns internal. For brigades, most of the projects I know about use public data. Someone else in the organization can probably answer question better.
* Olivia: We’re going to have a partner internal guidance coming soon.