Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA)
University of Minnesota

CURA:Tech Program Summary
January - November 2014
cura-tech.org
The McKnight Foundation is following the lead of other national foundations in funding projects that harness the energy of community-led efforts to solve social challenges by merging existing public data with technologies that can deliver accessible information by supporting the CURA:Tech program.

University of Minnesota continues to support the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs through its land-grant mission.

Open Twin Cities provided technical support and partnership during the CURA:Tech process, through their mission to foster an inclusive community of civic collaboration and champion open government and civic technology for positive social impact. Open Twin Cities is part of the Northside Digital Innovation Alliance, a relationship formed through CURA:Tech.

Thank you to the people and organizations who advised, supported and informed this project:


Table of Contents

About.................................................................4
CURA:Tech Engagement Strategy..................6
Discover Issues.................................................10
Team Up...........................................................12
Prototyping.....................................................16
Awards.............................................................24
What Did We Learn?......................................26

Collaborators

Thank You

Neeraj Mehta
Director, Community Based Research
Kris ten Murray
Program Developer
Andrew Tran
Research Assistant

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OpenTwinCities
Communities in our region are facing significant challenges for which they often do not have (or at least have not implemented) effective and affordable solutions. As we struggle, we also wrestle with the rapid changes that exist around us resulting in new, complex and shifting problems, but also open the door to new kinds of solutions. To navigate this choppy water, we need to be more innovative, flexible and adaptive. Here in the Twin Cities, there is a growing group of technologists and community leaders pursuing conversations and action around civic technology, open data and more collaboration between citizens with different skillsets and government.

About CURA:Tech

CURA:Tech emerges from the belief that technology has the power to transform communities, and that the cross-pollination of ideas by people of many different backgrounds working together can create bursts of creativity and innovation. We also believe that just as technology has become so completely embedded in whatever we’re doing at a personal level, technology can add significant value to our efforts in strengthening communities.

Drawing on conversations with community-based organizations, local partners, and national leaders in civic technology work, we developed CURA:Tech to:

• unearth local issues that civic technology can address
• support collaborative development of these technologies
• create benefit for low income communities and communities of color
• contribute, with partners and participants, to the local conversation about civic technology development and public data access

The Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA) connects the resources of the University of Minnesota with the interests and needs of urban communities and the region for the benefit of all.

CURA pursue its urban and regional mission by facilitating and supporting connections between state and local governments, communities, nonprofit organizations, and relevant resources at the University, including faculty and students from appropriate campuses, colleges, centers, or departments. Central to our work is building and supporting an environment that links the skills and wisdom present within every community with the specialized knowledge and academic discipline of a vital urban university.

Our center is home to a diverse array of community programs that together provide a rich, and unique blend of leadership, resources, and technical skills available to local communities at no cost. Through our research, community focused programs and collaborative partnerships, CURA’s community programs create innovative solutions that promote equity and opportunity in communities throughout the Twin Cities metropolitan region.

CURA’s community programs use a decentralized exploration of alternative solutions to social problems. We put our resources and energy in the center of communities, supporting their efforts to innovate, experiment and persist in their work of dealing with the current and future challenges they face. Our partnership provides an essential ingredient for supporting their efforts. CURA’s community programs start with conversation on the ground with our community-based partners asking questions and listening well to what they are saying.

Why an incubator?

We used an incubator approach to encourage collaboration and iterative development and testing of tools. In addition to providing monetary awards to support the sustained development of civic technologies, the incubator included gatherings, workshops and mentorship that built capacity and community. Public events invited a broader audience to learn what’s being worked on and contribute feedback.

What types of issues are right for civic technology to address?

Good candidates for civic tech work include issues that can be addressed by making data or other information more available and accessible to people, so that they can make more informed decisions, access resources more effectively, or communicate to a wider audience. Data can be quantitative (numbers), qualitative (processes, stories, words), or both. Projects can connect people to information, such as information that is public but may not be available and/or readily understandable in its current format. Projects might also collect data or other information, create new knowledge, stories, or possibilities.

We were especially interested in how civic technology can increase and improve access to jobs, transportation, housing, education, health resources, a safe environment, and engagement with government and decision makers.

Why focus on projects that benefit communities of color and low-income communities?

We were explicitly interested in how CURA:Tech could create benefit for low-income communities and communities of color. This focus of attention that was largely missing from the mainstream civic tech conversation. Participation in community-led, grassroots civic tech work has come mainly from the technology fields—fields in which there is a stark lack of representation of people of color. In addition, people of color face disparities in a broad range of measures of well-being, including employment rates, income, health indicators, foreclosure rates, and graduation rates.

As energy has built around civic technology in past several years, CURA and our partners felt it was important to explicitly seek out opportunities for civic tech projects to benefit communities of color and low-income communities, and to explore ways for more diverse perspectives to inspire, drive and contribute to civic technology development. We opted to use a focused approach to strive for focused benefit.

What is civic technology?

Civic technologies are tools that help people connect, have a voice in public processes, access and deliver resources and information, visualize the present and imagine the future. Civic technologies can be digital, information-based tools like mobile apps, websites, data visualizations, animations, text messaging systems, or other phone-based systems. These digital technologies can also dovetail with “low-tech” tools, such as printed material, posters, physical games, and other objects.

Key Questions

What is civic technology?

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When we started planning CURA:Tech, we noticed that...

- There was limited access to open data in the Twin Cities.
  In some cities and regions, municipal governments have released numerous public datasets. This availability of data has fueled civic tech competitions in these cities. The Twin Cities had not yet seen a large release of public data, and so open data sets were not a viable starting point for civic tech projects.

- Community-driven civic technology was most often developed at local hackathons.
  While there were a few individual technology developers and designers working on their own civic tech projects, the primary community space and vehicle for developing civic technologies were events called “hackathons,” organized by the local open government advocacy group Open Twin Cities, CURA, and others.

- The people who were typically involved in civic tech efforts were predominantly white and male.
  Most of the individuals working on civic tech projects (on their own or at hackathons and other community events) were white and male, mirroring the demographics of the technology development sector.

- Relationships didn’t necessarily exist between the people who build technology and the people working on community issues that civic tech could address.
  Existing relationships between civic-minded technologists and the community leaders and organizations already working on solving community issues (likely in non-technological ways) were limited, and there were few opportunities to meet one another, talk about challenges and potential solutions, and build collaborations.

**Process**

In response to these existing challenges, we used an incubator approach that layered additional resources on top of monetary awards to build the capacity of program participants to develop technology-based solutions. By providing continual feedback, mentorship, technical assistance, small grants to support the development of prototypes, and opportunities for our partners to create new relationships, we were able to facilitate a collaborative environment throughout the process.

**Communications and Resources**

To clarify the possibilities of civic technology and address the challenge of connecting civic-minded technologists and community organizations, we deployed several tools including a website, blog, and an online forum. The website communicated key information related to the program’s process, the blog shared examples of civic tech, and the forum enabled participants to connect and discuss ideas.
Civic Tech: A Convergence of Fields

This review incorporates tech companies and projects from several fields of work. Only projects primarily focused on promoting civic outcomes were included.

- Government data
- Community organizing
- Civic tech
- Social networks
- Peer-to-peer sharing of resident-owned goods and services
- Public data access and transparency
- Internal performance and analytics software
- Virtual, professional or practice-based networks
- Place-based networks and community forums
- Funding for projects that enhance public services and spaces
- Funding for consumer and commercial products
- Tools for procuring paid services from local vendors and sharing of corporate-owned assets
- Collaborative consumption
- Internal performance and analytics software

Resources: Civic Technology Research and Examples

Due to the relative infancy of civic technology, we referenced a report by the Knight Foundation to better understand and communicate the nature of civic technology. Knight conducted a survey and uncovered five themes in civic tech. We used this as a framework to highlight tools in the civic tech landscape and as a resource for our program participants (several examples are included on the following page).

Housing & Transportation Affordability Index
Center for Neighborhood Technology (CNT)
Chicago, IL

The Housing and Transportation Affordability Index that allows users to examine housing and transportation costs at the neighborhood level. Users can access housing and transportation data in the form of maps, charts, and statistics making it accessible a diverse audience.

Source: htaindex.cnt.org

Stop Beef
New Orleans, LA

Stop Beef is a conflict mediation tool that allows users to report conflicts and find the best mediators to resolve the conflict before it results in violence.

Source: stopbeef.com

The Public Agenda
Buildingcommunity WORKSHOP
Dallas, TX

This interactive map allows users to understand the city council agenda in a geographic format and increases awareness of how citizens can be a part of the decision making process.

Source: www.bcworkshop.org/bcW/the-public-agenda

E-Democracy
Minneapolis-Saint Paul, MN

E-Democracy utilizes online tools to create a virtual public space to support participation and build democracy.

Source: e-democracy.org

The Public

Stop Violence From Happening Right Now.

Stop Beef

E-Democracy
Discover Issues

About
During this phase, we asked the question, “How can technology strengthen your community?” We focused our efforts on reaching out to voices that are often absent in the civic tech world: people of color, young people, and women. We used informal gatherings and 1:1s to inform people and organizations of opportunities for funding to support projects they’re currently doing or initiatives they are interested in but don’t have the capacity to do. Our info sessions also fostered initial bridging between technologists, designers, and people working on issues facing the community.

Project Launch
January 27
Purpose:
• Provide resources and inform audience about CURA:Tech, civic technology, and opportunities.
• Build interest in the program.

Goals:
• Generate interest in the program and upcoming events.
• Provide resources and inform audience about CURA:Tech, civic technology, and opportunities.

Information Sessions / Mixers
February 4 and 5
Purpose:
• Inform participants of program timeline, requirements, and upcoming opportunities.
• Explain general concepts to participants including civic technology and design thinking.
• Provide examples of potential tools and proposals.
• Explain CURA:Tech’s funding process.

Goals:
• Generate participant interest in applying for the human-centered design workshop.
• Foster potential collaboration.

Participants:
February 4 session: 16 participants
February 5 session: 15 participants
Community-based Organizations: 14
Community Members: 2
Designers: 6
Local Government Staff: 1
Technologists: 8

Outcome:
22 info session attendees applied for Human Centered Design Workshop

Applications for Human Centered Design Workshop
February 27
Purpose:
• Understand initial interest areas and potential project proposals.
• Identify potential expertise needed based on interest areas.
• Identify shared interests among participants.

Applicants: 54

Hats That Applicants Wear
We asked our applicants what hats they wear. The graphic below represents the number of responses we received from the 54 applicants.

About
Taking researcher Scott Page’s findings—that diverse teams of people solve problems better than experts in one area—to heart, we worked hard to engage a diverse group of people in CURA:Tech early and often. We wanted to offer opportunities for our partners to create new relationships and collaborate across skills, and to this end held a human-centered design workshop and a series of collaboration sessions. These opportunities were intended to build on and expand participants’ skills, knowledge and relationships to develop a well defined project proposal. While we did not require that Phase 1 applicants attend the workshop and collaboration sessions, feedback indicated that they found it valuable beyond the CURA:Tech process.

Team Up
and develop proposals
2014
• JAN 22
• FEB 4 & 5
• FEB 27

Human Centered Design Workshop
2014
• MAR 28 & 29
• APR 8, 15, 22, & 28
• MAY 11

Collaboration Sessions
Phase 1 Applications
Participants’ Feedback

“I enjoyed the workshop and found it applicable to all areas of my life.”

“The workshop allowed me to combine my business and social media background through prototyping.”

“I learned how little I know about the overall development of an application and/or prototype that would best serve the community.”

“I found the session to be a far-reaching learning experience that could be considered on life’s journey one of those experiences that will forever impact me.”

“I wish there were more opportunities to meet people interested in similar issues who I could later collaborate with on a project.”

“It would have been nice if we could have self organized around topics that interested us and worked on an idea related to that topic.”

“I would have loved to have had a bit more time discuss skill sets and projects amongst the group. If there had been a running signup/skills wall that people could populate, that might have been useful.”

“The training challenged me to think outside the normal parameters that I would default. The support of CURA staff and Azul 7 made the training vigorous but overwhelmingly positive.”

Human Centered Design Workshop
March 28, 29
Format: Full-day, immersive workshops, facilitated by Azul 7, a Minneapolis-based design firm
Participants: 51
Goals:
- Provide human centered design training and exposure for program participants.
- Provide opportunities for people with diverse expertise and perspectives to work together in teams early.
- Encourage teams to make and learn from quick low-tech prototypes.
- Build capacity that participants can use in other areas of their work.

What is human-centered design?
Human-centered design is a way of problem-solving that focuses on people and their unique experiences, environments and perspectives. It encourages a team of problem-solvers to build and test out ideas early, and refine their solutions by getting feedback from those who will use their designs firsthand. This approach grew out of the Stanford Design School’s ‘Design Thinking’ model based on five modes of thinking:

- Empathize
- Define
- Ideate
- Prototype
- Test

Why human-centered design?
We included a human-centered design workshop and encouraged teams to use design strategies (problem identification, user feedback, testing, etc.) in part because of community partners’ input that projects focus on an issue and need, rather than on a technological solution. Thus, the workshop was intended to provide the skills for participants to identify the right issue and appropriate tool by focusing on people.

Collaboration Sessions
April 8, 15, 22, and 28
Format: Evening gatherings, some in conjunction with Open Twin Cities meet-ups (the local Code for America brigade meeting)
Participants: 22, 18, 12, and 6 respectively
Goal:
Create space for informal discussion about issues and potential solutions, as well as team-building among people with diverse skillsets.
Applications for Phase 1 Awards
Deadline: May 11

Goals:
• Collaboration among people who bring diverse skills and perspectives through the application process.
• Proposals that address locally identified issues and capitalize on multiple disciplines, backgrounds, and skills.
• Proposals to develop civic technology prototypes and get feedback from potential users of the tool along the way.

Outcomes:
• 20 applications
  • 14 applicants from teams who attended Human-Centered Design Workshop
  • 6 applicants from teams who did not attend the workshop
  • Of the 20 projects that applied for Phase 1 funding, 6 areas of focus emerged and are described below and on the adjacent page.

Community Building/Resource Sharing
3 proposals
Community building projects addressed the importance of collective effort by helping individuals and organizations create and strengthen relationships. These projects also addresses resource and skill sharing to mobilize around shared interests.

Advancing Communities of Color and Underrepresented Groups
5 proposals
Under-served communities and communities of color lack resources to achieve social and economic mobility. These tools propose to benefit these communities by making access to jobs and information more equitable.

Sustainable Food and Environmental Advocacy
4 proposals
Information about sustainable food practices, such as composting and local food sources, is not always readily accessible to the public. Additionally, advocating for environmental issues can be a complex process for many individuals and communities. These projects seek to connect people with information and resources in their neighborhoods, cities, and regions.

Youth Capacity Building
4 proposals
Youth, especially youth of color and youth from low-income backgrounds, face barriers in accessing information that can positively affect their health and educational and employment outcomes. These projects address these barriers by using civic technology to connect youth to resources that build their capacity and support their wellbeing.

Civic Engagement
3 proposals
Major barriers prevent individuals and communities from having an active voice in decisions that affect their neighborhoods, such as traditional town hall meetings that are not accessible to many community members. These projects make it easier for community members to participate in civic decision-making by going to where the people are, bringing the public meeting to the people, and increasing transparency of public decision-making processes.
CURA:Tech received 20 applicants for funding to develop a prototype. A review panel working with CURA staff selected seven applicants that demonstrated the criteria below in their proposals.

- Addresses a community-identified local issue
- Innovative (better than the way things are done now, novel)
- Informed by feedback from potential users during development
- Created by collaborative teams of at least three people working across skills, expertise, perspectives, organizations and/or sectors
- Has a digital form (though integrating low-tech elements is great, too, if it’s important for the design)
- Has a plan for sustainability (including, but not limited to, being built using open source technologies)
- Benefits low-income communities and communities of color

To aid us in this process, we included professionals and experts in strategic communications and advocacy, civic tech; technology design and development; and social entrepreneurship as part of a selection panel. The panel selected the following projects to receive Phase 1 grant funding:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROJECT</th>
<th>Organization Type</th>
<th>TOOL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activist Dashboard</td>
<td>Nonprofit (Center for Earth, Energy and Democracy)</td>
<td>Web application</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority Health DIAL</td>
<td>Newly formed team</td>
<td>Graphic &amp; audio media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhood Street Forum</td>
<td>Nonprofit (Cleveland Neighborhood Association)</td>
<td>Mobile video &amp; website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our City</td>
<td>Newly formed team</td>
<td>Web application</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuloko Tools</td>
<td>LLC (Tuloko)</td>
<td>Website &amp; mobile application</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What’s Werk</td>
<td>Nonprofit (Kitty Anderson Youth Science Center)</td>
<td>Video series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth in Crisis Technology Project - Text for Help Solution</td>
<td>Nonprofit (The Bridge for Youth)</td>
<td>Web application</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Throughout the summer, we checked in with teams and connected them to mentors when requested. We also hosted a group gathering for teams to share progress and questions and check in with one another.

**Activist Dashboard**

“Our crowd-sourced online tool—the activist dashboard—will be paired with the Environmental Justice (EJ) Mapping Tool to create a clearinghouse where individuals can track a given issue and find useful resources such as public hearings, timelines for citizen input, government officials, and relevant public agencies related to that issue.”

**Q & A:**

**Q: Who will benefit from this tool?**

**A:** This ‘activist dashboard’ benefits marginalized communities (environmental justice community members) and decision-makers through greater opportunities for community engagement. As noted earlier, the community—particularly communities of color and low-income communities—are often unaware of a potentially environmentally-impacting project or concern until it is well underway.

**Q: How does ‘Activist Dashboard’ strengthen the community?**

**A:** This tool, which compliments the EJ Mapping Tool (which conveys the state of the environment through an equity lens) is desperately needed. The EJ Mapping Tool provides a multi-layered, multi-faceted look at the condition of the environment and environmental health in the Twin Cities. However, now, with the Dashboard, community members will be able to act upon this information. A necessary key way to reach community members across the digital divide is to empower locally-based grassroots organizers to inform fellow activists using powerful visual images that illustrate current and future threats and inspire action to prevent damaging impacts.

**Phase 1 Funding:** $10,000

**Team:**
- Shalini Gupta - Executive Director and Director of Policy, Center for Earth, Energy and Democracy
- Dr. Cecilia Martinez - Director of Research, Center for Earth, Energy and Democracy
- Sammie Ardito Rivera - Climate Justice Organizer, Center for Earth, Energy and Democracy
- Sandra Wolfe Wood - Graphic designer - Assoc Director, AIGA Minnesota Design for Good, design thinking practitioner
- Ange Wang, Digital designer, Adjunct Professor, College of Design, University of Minnesota, design thinking practitioner
- Anne Knauff - UX lead for web, Thomson Reuters
Minority Health DIAL

“The Minority Health DIAL (Data Innovation & Advancement Lab) Project will connect Hennepin County’s Public Health Department, a Hmong community-based, and a Hmong community members with artists, designers and other creative professionals, to collaboratively develop, disseminate, and evaluate better designed, more impactful, and effectively distributed Hepatitis B information for at-risk limited English proficient (LEP) Hmong immigrants and refugees, as a means to improve their health and the health of the community. The Project will be a prototype for innovative and successful multi-sector collaborations to improve public health communications with LEP communities and mitigate health disparities for under-served communities of color.”

Q & A:

Q: Who will benefit from ‘Minority Health DIAL’?

A: The DIAL’s ultimate goal is to help under-served communities of color, especially LEP communities, achieve improved well-being and better lives. In reaching our goal, the DIAL serves four key audiences: LEP community members, public agencies, community organizations, and artist/creative professionals.

Q: How have you engaged with potential users in the process?

A: The DIAL Group actively participates in discussions with key stakeholders of public initiatives, the creative community, and community leaders/organizations. Engaging with the potential users is one of the key principles and activities of the DIAL, and one of the main project objectives. As we progress to engage more people and work on more DIAL-led campaigns, we will continue to grow our networks and the number of potential users of the tool and services.

Q: How have you engaged with potential users in the process?

A: It was an intentional part of the design of the project to have the young people to be the touch point for the community engagement—have them design how we want to use the tool or how the tool is going to develop. We really wanted to concentrate on people who are generally marginalized in the community engagement conversations: young people, people of color, and people who don’t show up to meetings. Then we tried to figure out how to make it more accessible to more people in the community to participate.

Q: How does ‘Neighborhood Street Forum’ strengthen the community?

A: Street Forum strengthens the community by providing a tool that’s outside of the traditional tools and the neighborhood organizing tool belt that we usually use. It’s using simple technology; it’s using the ability to shoot video on a mobile phone or just a camera that we can then bring and create a virtual documentation of community input.

Phase 1 Funding: $10,000

Team: 
David Kang - Creative Consultant, Media Producer, & Project Director, Hana Media & Development
Raiza Beltran - Public Health Specialist & Community-based Organization, Neighborhood House
Mong Yang - Design Specialist & Filmmaker

Quinn & Ariah - Hennepin County’s Public Health Department
Mungyeon Kim - Hmong community members with artists, designers and other creative professionals

Q: Can you briefly describe the project?

A: We will pilot innovative community engagement in a typically under-represented constituency by utilizing technology, video, and social media, to build a platform for engaged community residents. In phase one, four high school students will produce weekly videos highlighting resident voices on important issues and asking politicians to respond.

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**Our City**

"The Goal of the Minneapolis Civic Agenda will be to facilitate transparency into the governing process of City Council and increase public engagement through more open access to policy makers and allowing citizens a better understanding of the decision making process."

- **Phase 1 Funding:** $10,000
- **Team:**
  - Rosie Hoyem - Web Developer, Population Center, University of Minnesota
  - Bobbi Dahlstrom - Lawyer
  - Matt Barthelemy - City of Minneapolis Neighborhood and Community Engagement Commission
  - Ben Ortega - Software Architect, GovDelivery Inc.
  - Ben Rosas - Web Developer, GovDelivery
  - Sarah McKenzie - Editor, SW Journal and Adjunct Professor, School of Journalism, University of Minnesota

**Tuloko Tools**

"Tuloko is an internet-based social enterprise that provides products and services focused on the development, growth, and employment of small, women, and minority owned businesses. By curating business information on diverse businesses, we help connect consumers, large corporations, government agencies, and educational institutions with these historically underutilized businesses."

- **Phase 1 Funding:** $10,000
- **Team:**
  - Sean Armstrong - Strategy and Technology, Toloko
  - Duane Johnson - Business Development and Marketing, Tuloko

**Q & A:**

**Q:** How does 'Our City' strengthen the community?

**A:** Our City strengthens the community by offering people an opportunity to engage and be aware of the discussion that is going on regarding issues that are of interest to them.

**Q:** What did you enjoy about the project?

**A:** The project has been a great learning experience. Pulling together an interdisciplinary team is definitely challenging but I think we all learned a lot about working on an interdisciplinary team. We also learned a lot about the City Council process itself. Even living in Minneapolis, I didn't really understand how the legislative process really works. We had to learn a lot about that to be able to make it a more transparent process.

**Q:** How does 'Tuloko' strengthen the community?

**A:** Tuloko strengthens the community by providing a conduit for consumers to find and rate black owned businesses within their community. Basically, when people support these businesses, dollars can be recycled in the business. When the business gets customers and capital they can expand and hire people from the community so it can lower unemployment rates as well as lower crime rates within the area.

**Q:** What were some of the challenges of the project?

**A:** One, of course, is funding. Which was great that CURA believed in what we're doing so far to give us some seed capital to expand this product. Trying to get stakeholders to buy into the product is 50/50; in terms of the consumers, they love it, they want it. I'm glad that CURA took the time to invest in a project like ours since we're an LLC when historically a lot of these grants go to nonprofits. Now that the McKnight Foundation and CURA are seeing the good that we're doing, where we are providing a double bottom line, this can help project us to the next level.
Youth in Crisis Technology Project - Text for Help Solution

“The Youth in Crisis Technology Project (YCTP) Text for Help Solution will directly connect counselors to youth in crisis through SMS: a communication means that can be silent and private. Help will no longer be a phone call away; it will land in a young person’s mobile device.

Phase 1 Funding: $10,000

Team:
- Marie Harvat - Project Manager, Information Technology, The Bridge for Youth
- Lindsay Vanderheiden - Operations Lead, Call Center Coordinator, The Bridge for Youth
- Janet Hallaway - Outreach, marketing, and fundraising lead, Interim Development Director, The Bridge for Youth
- Dev Jam - Technical Development Partner
- External Partners - Polaris, Project tecting lead, Leah Meyer, IT Innovation Advisory Committee

Q & A:

Q: How does ‘Youth in Crisis Technology Project - Text for Help Solution’ strengthen the community?
A: Our tool will strengthen the community through empowering teens to be able reach out when they're in crisis and be able to provide youth with the right resource at the right time.

Q: What did you enjoy about the project?
A: I have enjoyed connecting and interacting with people who aren't in our immediate nonprofit world: folks in the for-profit technology sector, people at the university, people at CURA, and being able to make connections that are broader than what we had before.
The Phase 2 award supported the continued development of several of the tools prototyped during Phase 1. All seven Phase 1 teams applied for a Phase 2 award, and three projects were funded:

- **Activist Dashboard**
- **Tuloko Green Book Network**
- **WhatsWerk**

Neighborhood Street Forum was also funded through another CURA program to continue development.

### Demo Day

**September 16**

**Format:** Public presentation

**Participants:** 60 (including the members of seven Phase 1 teams)

**Goals:**
- Share the prototypes and findings of Phase 1 teams
- Create space for networking and community-building
- Build awareness of civic technology, the people developing it, and the issues it can address

### CEED: Activist Dashboard

**Organization Type:** Nonprofit

**Tool:** Web application

**Phase 2 Funding:** $35,000

“Our crowdsourced online tool—the ‘activist dashboard’—will be paired with the Environmental Justice (EJ) Mapping Tool to create a clearinghouse where individuals can track a given issue and find useful resources such as public hearings, timelines for citizen input, government officials, and relevant public agencies related to that issue.”

### Tuloko: Green Book Network

**Organization Type:** LLC

**Tool:** Web application

**Phase 2 Funding:** $25,000

“Tuloko is a tech startup that creates internet products and services focused on the development and growth of women and minority-owned businesses. By curating information on these diverse firms, we help connect consumers, large corporations, and government procurement departments with these historically underutilized businesses.”

### Teen Tech Crew: WhatsWerk

**Organization Type:** Nonprofit

**Tool:** Web-based Video Series

**Phase 2 Funding:** $10,000

“What’sWerk is a fun and educational YouTube web series that teaches teens the necessary skills to get and maintain a job. It also seeks to connect teens to the resources, experiences, and youth serving organizations and employers that will help them in their career pathway.”

### Cleveland Neighborhood Association: Neighborhood Street Forum

**Organization Type:** Nonprofit

**Tool:** Mobile Video and Website

**Funding through CURA’s Neighborhood Partnership Initiative program:** $10,000

“We will launch an innovative, multi-faceted community engagement campaign to engage residents—especially under-represented constituencies. Utilizing technology, video, and social media, we seek to ensure responsiveness and action by elected officials and representatives, and to empower residents to have greater input into the decisions that affect their lives.”
What did we learn?

The CURA:Tech process was a learning experience for us in which we continuously adjusted our approach based on the needs that fostered collaboration and provided the appropriate support to make our partners’ projects successful. We learned the following themes in this process:

Focus on the issue first, not the technology, and leverage the leadership and knowledge of people and organizations who are already working on this issue.

Early on, community partners highlighted the importance of maintaining focus on social and political issues and opportunities, rather than on flashy technical solutions. Technology can tantalize us with its newness, but that doesn’t necessarily mean it is offering a solution that will make a difference in people’s lives. We found that using a human-centered design process helped keep focus on the issue being addressed and the feedback of people facing that issue. The people and organizations already working on these issues, and their expertise and experience, are key assets in this process.

It can’t just be technologists who are involved in creating civic technology.

People who bring diverse skills, experience, perspectives, relationships, and content knowledge need to be a part of building civic technology—not just at the point when there is a tool to be tested, but throughout the process, as the problem is being identified, as potential solutions are being imagined, and throughout deployment.

Developing tools that are effective—and that last—is an energy and time intensive endeavor.

Hackathons and other events are great at building community and can produce quick technology results, but these results can be fleeting. A technology project that lasts takes investment in project management, research, outreach, partnership-building, and consideration of ongoing support and funding. It’s important to think early about how the tool will be sustained, where its longer-term home will be, and how it will reach its audience.

Collaborative work can bring diverse perspectives and skills to bear on a tough issue, and it’s important to take the time to build a strong working relationship among the collaborators.

In Minneapolis–St. Paul, we found that there isn’t a lot of natural mixing between the technology and design communities and the social justice and nonprofit communities. These communities often bring different frameworks and approaches to problem-solving, and while there is much potential for new solutions to come out of these interdisciplinary partnerships, it takes relationship building, learning, and time to forge a productive partnership.

Invest in face-to-face interaction and community building.

Building technology and building community are not mutually exclusive. Most of the CURA:Tech Phase 1 teams talked about the value in asking real people—potential users of the tools they were developing—to share their experiences and feedback during the prototyping process. These interactions allowed the team to test both their assumptions and the prototype to develop a tool that is better vetted to meet the needs of its intended user.

We also heard from CURA:Tech participants how much they valued the face-to-face time with one another. For people and organizations supporting the civic tech field, it is worth it to invest in community building efforts that build relationships and capacity of people working in this space.
Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA)
University of Minnesota

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