

Startup in Residence Aims to Expand to 100 Cities, Announces Newest Local Government Projects

Ben Miller | May 22, 2018



SAN FRANCISCO — The Startup in Residence (STiR) program, which matches tech companies with local government workers to help them solve public-sector problems, wants to grow a lot bigger.

The program, which [started in San Francisco in 2014](#), has since expanded to 11 local governments across the U.S. But on May 22, as its most recent round of companies demonstrated their work at the Bridge SF conference in San Francisco, STiR's leaders announced they want to grow to include 100 local governments within five years.

It's a big goal. But Jay Nath, executive director of the City Innovate Foundation as well as the founder of STiR, thinks it's doable.

“One of the things that’s amazed me is that without any real marketing we’ve had nearly 100 cities reach out to us unsolicited, wanting to know more, wanting to partner, wanting to work with us — various levels of interest,” he said.

That will likely include some expansion into Canada. British Columbia has already set up its own STiR-like program, not officially affiliated with STiR, and Nath said he’s heard from several Canadian mayors who are interested in pursuing it.

Along the way, Nath will be looking to make STiR's fleet of participant governments more diverse. The bulk of its participants today are in California, and most of those are in the San Francisco Bay Area.

"We think there's an opportunity to speak with big cities, smaller communities, red cities, blue cities and across the U.S., whether it's on the coasts, in the South, in the Midwest — we really believe entrepreneurship is universal," he said.

STiR also released its list of most recent companies and projects to coincide with the companies' demo day. Here are the latest STiR companies:

Nordsense

Worked with: The San Francisco Department of Public Works

On: Garbage collection

Using sensors and the city's 311 system to gather data, Nordsense worked to identify patterns of public trash can use throughout the city.

"Together we were able to lay the groundwork for how we provide insights on finding the best can placements in the city," Soren Christensen, Nordsense's chief executive officer, wrote in an email.

ms.GIS

Worked with: The San Francisco Department of Public Works

On: Street sweeping

San Francisco's fleet of street sweeping vehicles drives 150,000 miles per year, removing 25,000 tons of debris and preventing it from entering the sewers and ocean. And they've been doing all the routing required for that work with paper.

"The city of San Francisco had a software tool which did not work out so they had ... a lot of printouts and Post-Its on top," said Marcus Scheiber, ms.GIS' CEO.

The company, which has a presence in Austria as well as the U.S., worked with the Department of Public Works to bring that routing work onto a digital mapping platform. Drivers received mobile devices in their vehicles that could deliver vocal directions as they drive, instead of those drivers consulting handbooks in the middle of their work.

"Any changes and updates and improvements you make to these routes will be done once ... without reproducing paper or making copies, and then it's automatically loaded onto a tablet in the trucks," Scheiber said. "So it's a seamless process that is much faster and much safer in its final application."

In the future, Scheiber said he wants to support route optimization and other applications as well.

ZenCity

Worked with: San Francisco's 311 system

On: Citizen request routing

San Francisco's 311 system was experiencing an increasing number of citizen requests going to the wrong departments, which meant more work for city staff, longer response times for citizens and sometimes the wrong solution being delivered. So through STiR, it worked with ZenCity to try to fix it.

ZenCity used its classification capabilities, part of its existing software offerings, to increase the system's accuracy.

"We used our AI-based classification algorithm, which classifies citizen-generated data to different city departments with a high level of accuracy, to recommend to what agency to send each service request," wrote Eyal Feder, ZenCity's CEO, in an email. "The project resulted in a significantly improved routing accuracy."

Conversation.one

Worked with: San Francisco International Airport

On: Information delivery

Conversation.one, which offers tools for users to set up chatbots and work with assistant-type devices like Amazon's Alexa, worked with the airport to develop an interface that deliver information to customers using natural language.

Symbium

Worked with: San Francisco's Planning Department

On: Economic development

It's tough to start a business. One has to find a place in the city they can operate, apply for permits and licenses and more.

The San Francisco Planning Department had one bottleneck in particular that it wanted to solve: location scouting.

"In such cases, constituents have to painfully navigate a complex maze of zoning regulations, involving repeated trips and calls to the information counter," Symbium CEO Leila Banijamali wrote in an email.

So the company went to the department's customer service counter and saw first-hand how the bottleneck develops, and then worked to deliver a custom solution that could be incorporated into staff's workflow.

"With help from SF Planning, our team has developed a powerful yet intuitive online solution enables constituents to find out, with a few clicks, whether their proposed business is permitted in a chosen location and to search for all locations in the city where their business is permitted," Banijamali wrote.

Gruntify

The company, GIS People, worked with three separate STiR participants on three different problems. All of them incorporated its flagship product, Gruntify, which is workflow software.

Worked with: The San Francisco Bay Area Metropolitan Transportation Commission

On: Emergency response

The company integrated Gruntify with multiple stakeholders, including California Highway Patrol, towing companies and Waze, to help clear accident scenes faster.

Worked with: The Miami-Dade County, Fla., Department of Transportation and Public Works

On: 311 service requests

GIS People helped streamline manual, paper-based processes to make 311 responses faster and cheaper.

Worked with: The city of Houston

On: Building management

In the wake of extensive flooding caused by Hurricane Harvey, the team worked to help compile a register of buildings the city owns so that it can better track damages for insurance purposes.

GovRock

Worked with: Multiple departments within the city of West Sacramento, Calif.

On: Volunteering and events management

This company, previously known as Help Emerge, has a product that allows government staff to post and promote events and volunteer opportunities across multiple channels, and over time build a list of engaged community members.

The idea is to create more constant contact with community members, and then to have a list of active citizens ready to go at a moment's notice when an emergency happens.

"Our goal was really to create the base of a system that could engage communities day to day, with the idea that eventually we could reach out to populations during disasters as well in maybe a more robust way than the platforms we have today," said Ryan Luginbuhl, the company's CEO.

Kamego

Worked with: Houston's Health Department

On: Contacting city employees

Houston lacks a central system for employee contact information, which means that in an emergency the city might have a hard time finding out if its workers are all right, or asking them to help respond.

So it worked with Kamego to create such a system. The company has developed it, and the city is in the middle of testing it.

“The city of Houston wants to be able to quickly find employees by select criteria (including language ability and commute distance from a site) and determine their ability to report for a new (emergency) duty assignment,” company co-founder Jennifer Blumberg wrote in an email. “They could be looking to staff over 50 separate sites across the city with approximately 100 people at each per shift — with little advance warning.”

<http://www.govtech.com/biz/Startup-in-Residence-Aims-to-Expand-to-100-Cities-Announces-Newest-Local-Government-Projects.html>