

## San Francisco's Superpublic: Cross-Discipline Working Space to Target City Challenges

Colin Wood | May 10, 2016



Collaboration has a new home in San Francisco.

On May 9, the mayor's office and partners announced the upcoming launch of a new co-working space designed for cross-agency and cross-sector collaboration on the city's most complex challenges. Called [Superpublic](#), the 5,000-square-foot space is housed, spiritually and physically, right next door to the federal government's innovation arm, 18F.

Partnered with the U.S. General Services Administration, the U.S. Department of Commerce, and City Innovate Foundation, the San Francisco Mayor's Office of Civic Innovation intends to use the space as a platform for cross-disciplinary work where previous institutional and geographic barriers would have made the work difficult.

"To move things forward, for example, in transportation requires SFMTA [San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency] together with people from the mayor's office, together with people from DOT, together with private actors thinking through solutions," explained City Innovate Foundation Chairman Peter Hirshberg. "Of course San Francisco has many open innovation facilities, incubators and co-working spaces, but there's never really been one whose purpose was to bring people together from different agencies within a city government, and between federal, city and state government, and with both startups and companies to work together on problems."

GSA's role in the partnership is to serve as the city's landlord and also to help the city develop its services through the GSA's recently announced Technology Transformation Service. The U.S. Department of Commerce's partnership role is to provide technical support and advance the president's Smart Cities initiative, focusing specifically on economic development of local businesses.

"People come to San Francisco for its spirit of innovation and entrepreneurship, and the belief that we can achieve anything if we work together. We've never considered innovation to be simply about technology," said Chief Innovation Officer Jay Nath. "It has to be combined with a spirit of collaboration, of willingness and an understanding that people from all different skill sets can come in and solve problems that government has for many years done in silos."

Creating performance-based procurement and improving transportation in the city are two projects that the mayor's office would like to use Superpublic for right away, Nath said.

"More than half of all the trips in San Francisco use public transit, something we're very proud of, but there are still too many people who rely on cars to get around," Nath added. "Our city can't build wider streets to fit the growing population. There isn't the room. Instead, we need to make sure our transportation systems, both public and private, are using resources and working as effectively as possible."

The Department of Transportation is also housed on the same floor as Superpublic, Nath pointed out, emphasizing the importance of breaking down the physical space that divides government's entrenched silos. When asked about the institutional barriers to cross-agency collaboration, Nath said he was confident in the city's ability to work together.

"I think just having everybody in the same place resolves many of those issues," Nath said. "One of the ways we're going to be achieving participation is around these policy areas. ... We're not always going to get 100 percent participation, but we think we have those relationships from the mayor's office to be able to bring people together. We've demonstrated that we know how to create compelling content and we know how to

create the right set of forums to invite people in. So we'll see how it goes, but I think that won't really be an issue."

Academic and private-sector partners announced so far include UC Berkeley, the Center for Design Research at Stanford University, the MIT Media Lab "City Science," Microsoft, Deloitte, Local Government Commission. The [lab](#)'s ribbon cutting is scheduled for late spring this year.

<http://www.govtech.com/civic/San-Franciscos-Superpublic-Cross-Discipline-Working-Space-to-Target-City-Challenges.html>