

Startup Workshops to Help New Gov Tech Companies Understand Gov

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Abhi Nemani, the 28-year-old gov tech whizkid who cut his teeth as an executive at Code for America before serving as chief data officer in Los Angeles and interim chief innovation officer in Sacramento, is launching “[acceleration workshops](#)” for startups that want to do business with city and county governments.

A service of Nemani’s one-man firm consulting firm [EthosLabs](#), the workshops aim to help companies refine products and pitches for local governments. Nemani’s clients point to his experience in gov tech that spans the public, private and nonprofit sectors.

“He knows everyone in the space,” said Catherine Geanuracos, chief operating officer of [CityGrows](#), a cloud-based [digital services platform](#) for government. Geanuracos said Nemani also stands out for his ability to give informed and honest assessments about local government operations.

“He has a forward-thinking point of view around the potential for technology in government and a realistic view of changes and limitations,” she said. Nemani is an investor in CityGrows.

Nemani's startup workshop, which will likely begin in May, would give technology companies a crash course in doing business with local government. Nemani, who is based in St. Louis, plans to fly out to meet executives at their startups for the educational seminars.

Companies would learn, for example, the difference between strong mayor and weak mayor systems, and how those organizational structures impact how private tech companies pitch to public officials.

Those operational differences can "have a profound effect on who the decision-maker is," Nemani said. "It's often missed or not understood by new entrants into the market."

The workshops would also give startups an overview of established gov tech contractors across the U.S., and how new entrants can sell officials on newer technologies that complement existing processes.

"The problem that a [city IT leader] faces is less about how exciting or interesting is this product — it's the opposite," Nemani said. "It's how will this product fit with everything else I have going on?"

Seamus Kraft, executive director and co-founder of The OpenGov Foundation, a nonprofit that promotes government transparency, said Nemani's experience allows him to stand above other consultants entering the gov tech arena.

"Few people can look you in the eye and say, 'I've been there and done that in the government technology world,' and Abhi is one of the few people," Kraft said. Nemani is vice president of the OpenGov board, beside chairman Rep. Darrell Issa.

Nemani joined Code for America in 2010, where he helped establish the [Civic Startup Accelerator](#), a partnership between the national civic tech nonprofit and the city and county of San Francisco to apply innovative technologies to government problems.

Nemani was tapped in 2014 by Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti to become the city's chief data officer. There, Nemani authored the city's [open data policy](#) that formalized the city's leading open data practices. Nemani also established a city data [GeoHub](#) that opened access to more than 1,000 data sets.

Then in early 2016, then-Sacramento Mayor Kevin Johnson [appointed Nemani](#) as his interim chief innovation officer, a part-time consultancy role that handed Nemani the reins of a multimillion dollar economic development fund. Local lawmakers directed the \$8.2 million "innovation fund" toward programs that bolstered the city's tech sector. During his tenure with Sacramento, Nemani helped design a grant program to grow and capitalize Sacramento area startups.

Nemani said he stopped working with the city of Sacramento after his contract expired last December. The grant program, known as Rapid Acceleration, Innovation and Leadership, will launch its next application period in spring or early summer, said Ash Roughani, who now heads the Sacramento Mayor's Office of Innovation and Entrepreneurship.

Nemani launched EthosLabs about a year ago. In that time, he's worked with a handful of gov tech startups in different capacities, either as a board member or paid consultant.

He said he's starting Startup Workshop to expand the number of startups he can work with.

By Nemani's estimate, there are between 50 to 100 consultants in the gov tech space, not including the large consulting teams working for megafirms like Deloitte. But many of those individual consultants aren't full-time, Nemani said.

Given the recent [growth in investment](#) in the national gov tech sector, Geanuracos of CityGrows said Nemani's startup workshop could be a harbinger of a cottage industry.

"As the sector grows and matures, it makes sense that more folks like Abhi will be able to provide a robust consultancy," she said.

<http://www.govtech.com/civic/Startup-Workshops-to-Help-New-Gov-Tech-Companies-Understand-Gov.html>