

What's New in Civic Tech: Virginia Governor Signs Bill to Create CDO Position

Zack Quaintance | June 28, 2018



Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam has signed legislation to create a new role within his administration: a statewide chief data officer (CDO).

The creation of the role, which is present in eight other states, is part of the [Government Data Collection and Dissemination Practices Act](#), which the governor signed June 18. The new position will be housed in the Office of the Secretary of Administration, and it will be tasked with "developing guidelines regarding data usage, storage and privacy." Other responsibilities will include coordinating and overseeing data sharing throughout the state, as well as promoting the use of data to improve the delivery of governmental services.

The Northern Virginia Technology Council was a lead advocate for the legislation, said Troy Murphy, public policy manager at NVTC, via email.

The bill also creates a temporary Data Sharing and Analytics Advisory Committee to advise the CDO in early establishment of guidelines and best practices as the governor's office and legislature establish a more permanent data structure.

In total, more than 12 bills were introduced related to the creation of the CDO position, data sharing and open data. It was ultimately [SB 580](#) that passed and was signed into law by Gov. Northam. The budget now includes \$197,000 a year to fund the role.

The effort to [permanently establish a CDO](#) in Virginia has been ongoing for some time.

Austin hackathon leads to creation of anti-human trafficking app

Following the recent ATX Hack for Change event in Austin, Texas, a team of civic technologists have built an anti-human trafficking app.

Dubbed RedFlag, the app gives “concerned citizens a platform to combat human trafficking by anonymously contacting 911.” Users can then give authorities information about suspected human trafficking activities, victims and perpetrators, according to an [online announcement](#). RedFlag is a collaborative effort between civic technologists and Texas’ Office of the Attorney General, Department of Information Resources and Statewide Data Coordinator.

Residents can use the app either covertly or overtly, with the anonymous 911 option intended to help those who are in immediate danger and wish to avoid being detected and subsequently harmed. The app can track location, and it can also be used to upload images or to obtain information about what to do in emergency and non-emergency situations.

The announcement notes that Texas Statewide Data Coordinator Ed Kelly and data analyst Juliana Dierker worked with attorney general staff and civic technologists in the Austin area to create the app during the ATX Hack for Change event, which was held during the first week in June at the city’s St. Edward’s University campus. App developers donated their time and effort to create the program in order to enhance the public good.

Civic tech project identifies 51 places where sewage flows into Chicago River

The URL really says it all: istheresewageinthechicagoriver.com.

This is the question that civic technologists in Chicago set out to answer when they built the site, which is essentially a log of the exact days when sewage has been dumped into the Chicago River. At the top of the page there is a real-time feature that tells visitors if sewage is currently flowing into the river.

Visitors can also click a link to see occurrences dating back to 2007. There is information on the homepage that explains the history behind sewage in the river, why it started and what other facts interested parties might want to be aware of.

Those facts include things like, “It’s because of practices like these that the city [reversed the Chicago River’s flow in 1900](#) to avoid contaminating our drinking supply. As a result, a significant amount of ‘[nutrient pollution](#)’ from Chicago travels down the Illinois and Mississippi rivers and collects in the Gulf of Mexico in a [dead zone roughly the size of New Hampshire](#).”

Upon a recent visit to the site, the top read: "Is raw sewage being dumped into Chicago rivers right now? No, but sewage overflow has occurred on 660 days since 2007."

Executive director and founder departs from the open gov advocacy group the Data Coalition

Hudson Hollister, the founder and executive director of the open gov advocacy group the Data Coalition, will step down from his role leading the group as of Oct. 1, though he will remain on its board of directors, the group [has announced](#).

In a statement announcing the change, the group said Hollister was stepping away from leading it on a daily basis to pursue "new challenges."

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[A search](#) is now underway for a new executive director.

"Leading the Data Coalition, and later the Data Foundation as well, is the best job I've ever had," Hollister said in a statement. "Thanks to strong growth, they are ready for fresh leadership. I'm so proud of my team and grateful for the last six years. I look forward to welcoming my successors and supporting their work as a board member."

Two major gov tech organizations look to hire visual designers

A pair of major gov tech organizations are looking to hire visual designers, a role that is becoming increasingly prominent for agencies that provide public services.

The first group in search of a [visual designer](#) is the federal tech consultancy 18F, which posted an opening for the position on its [website](#). This is a remote position that the posting advertises as able to be based in Washington, D.C., Chicago, San Francisco or New York. A successful candidate will be asked to coordinate with 18F's federal agency partners, helping "to deliver user-centered and beautiful digital experiences for audiences both inside and outside of government."

New job alert: We have new openings for strategists and visual designers, but you have only 5 days to apply. More information - <https://t.co/3OW23A9ABi> <https://t.co/c1NcTNvUfu>

— 18F (@18F) [June 25, 2018](#)

The second group looking to hire a designer is [Code for America](#) (CfA), the nonprofit and nonpartisan group that aims to help government find new ways to use technology and thereby make its services function better for constituents. CfA is actually looking for a [design manager](#) to lead its designers' work.

That role would be based in San Francisco, and it would include managing designers, championing the use of design within other tech disciplines and more.

The fact of both of these prominent civic tech groups searching for designers right now is significant. Human- or [user-centric design](#), which takes into account the

needs of users over those of institutional regulations, is a rising discipline within local government.

In fact, earlier this month experts with Bloomberg's [What Works Cities](#), which works to celebrate and support public-sector innovation, wrote a [medium piece](#) about how designers are shaking up city halls.

<http://www.govtech.com/civic/Whats-New-in-Civic-Tech-Virginia-Governor-Signs-Bill-to-Create-CDO-Position.html>