

Indiana and Texas Announce Civic Hackathon Challenge

Justine Brown | January 23, 2015



On Jan. 22, Indiana and Texas jointly announced a new contest that will encourage residents of both states to create applications that support and inspire entrepreneurship and digital government innovation.

The #hackINvTX Challenge, which will run from Jan. 31 through Feb. 23, was designed to encourage government transparency and open data, and promote interstate collaboration and competition.

“We had discussed the idea of a hackathon with Texas a while back as a way to up the ante a bit and have a challenge that involved more than one state,” said Indiana CIO Paul Baltzell. “We felt like it would draw some attention and bring out some competitive spirit in solving civic problems for both states.”

Working together, the two states made the contest a reality.

Under the rules of the #hackINvTX Challenge, each state is presenting two challenges for citizens to tackle. Indiana’s first challenge is to create a centralized, streamlined and

secure platform for receiving, tracking and collaborating on permit applications for the Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM).

A significant part of IDEM's operations are the receiving and handling of documents that can include application permits, reports and correspondence. The agency currently manages 22 permit types. Today, the majority of these are received either in paper format or in a combination of paper and electronic media.

"Significant time in creating permits is lost in the hand-offs between the agency and its stakeholders," Baltzell said. "Any system that assists in streamlining the processes and is transparent for users will benefit all, and anything to move us away from paper would be a fantastic improvement."

Indiana's second challenge is a method to register and create a checklist of available/needed services for Hoosiers visiting a One-Stop-Shop after a disaster. The app that is developed would be utilized by the Indiana Department of Homeland Security.

"We had some horrific tornado damage a few years back that literally destroyed one town," Baltzell said. "We set up a One-Stop-Shop so displaced citizens could get a variety of government services in one place. They could order a duplicate driver's license, apply for FEMA aid, get emergency Food Stamps, or work with our family and social services agency, etc."

Therefore, the goal of Indiana's second challenge is a database to register those requesting assistance. The app would steer applicants through a series of questions to help match their needs with the agencies typically present when these events occur. Once the questions have been answered, the application would then provide a printed report to the individual to act as a checklist to guide them through the services available. In addition, reports would be provided to each agency listing all participants requesting their assistance.

"We feel like open data can play well into both of these challenges," Baltzell said.

Meanwhile, Texas is challenging its citizens to develop an app for the Department of Family and Protective Services that can provide map-based results and associated information about child-care operations using different search criteria, allowing families immediate access to safe and specific child care information.

The state's second challenge is to develop a mobile application for the Texas Department of Transportation that enables commuters to plan their travel more effectively. The app would provide businesses and commuters 24/7 access from any smart device to real-time travel conditions such as road closures, traffic delays and travel-related incidents along the entire 588-mile IH-35 corridor in Texas. This would allow the app's users to minimize travel times by adjusting their travel plans to avoid congested sections of the interstate, scheduled project lane closures and potential inclement weather. This in turn could help dissipate congestion faster, reduce fuel consumption and costs, reduce air pollution, improve safety, reduce the time it takes to move goods and services to market, and improve quality of life for travelers using IH-35.

“Texans are known for their inventiveness and creating opportunities from challenges,” said Todd Kimbriel, interim CIO for Texas. “I am confident the Texas team will bring forth ideas that are both innovative and useful.”

The winner from each state will earn \$4,000. A grand prize champion, which determines which state wins, will then be selected by a national panel from the two challenge winners. The grand prize winner will receive an additional \$4,000.

“I’m excited to have this partnership and this challenge with Texas because I think it’s going to bring some great solutions to both of our states,” Baltzell said. “It’s a great way to foster some entrepreneurship as well. If someone can solve a problem with an app, maybe they have created a product that can help them start a new business, which would be a fantastic outcome for both Indiana and Texas.”

No matter which state wins, Baltzell said the apps that come out of the contest will be the true measure of success.

“I’m really interested to see what sort of ideas folks are going to come up with. Every one of the hackathons I’ve had involvement with, I’ve seen people take it in ways that we didn’t even think about because they’ve got a completely outside perspective,” he said. “I’m interested to see where that goes, and in seeing what the innovative hackers come up with to help improve both of these problems or solve them.”

Indiana has partnered with the Indy Chamber and TechPoint to run the competition for Hoosiers. In Indiana, the #hackINvTX Challenge will kick off with a launch event Jan. 31 on the campus of Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, with satellite events across the state. A complete schedule of events in Indiana, including locations of satellite launch events, can be found at <http://techpoint.org/Hack-Indiana-Series/>.

More details about the hackathon, including the location of the Texas event and rules and full descriptions of the challenges can be found at <https://www.hackerleague.org/hackathons/texas-vs-indiana-challenge>.

<http://www.govtech.com/data/Indiana-and-Texas-Announce-Civic-Hackathon-Challenge.html>