

SF Hackathon Produces Legislative Alert App Prototype

Sarah Rich | December 12, 2011



Developers gathered over the weekend in San Francisco to compete in a 24-hour hackathon in an effort to build apps that benefit the community and help government agencies embrace transparency.

Of the completed and nearly completed products from the event, one team developed an app prototype that would send out legislative alerts via text message.

The hackathon, hosted by IT firm Granicus in partnership with CityCampSF, was a day-long event held Saturday, Dec. 10, that finished on Sunday, Dec. 11, to promote open data in government. Within the limited time frame, developers worked in teams to develop apps that help make government data more accessible.

The event took place just two days after California Sen. [Leland Yee](#), D-San Francisco/San Mateo, announced that he will introduce legislation next month to require public documents and data to be available electronically in a searchable, structured format so that keywords or names can be found more easily.

Yee, along with San Francisco CIO Jon Walton, were two of the many sponsors for the hackathon, according to Granicus.

“Producing a 2,000-page electronic document that cannot be searched or sorted is inadequate and almost useless,” said Yee said in a statement. “For too long, many government agencies — either by choice or inertia — have been living in the Stone Age when it comes to producing public documents. This bill will not only bring public agencies into the 21st century, but will ensure greater transparency and accountability.”

By the end of the 24-hour event, new and innovative concepts had been produced, according to Granicus CTO Javier Muniz.

One team developed what may be a first-of-its-kind prototype of an app that allows users to subscribe to legislative alerts, so when new legislation or an agenda item is introduced, users can receive updates on that legislation via text message, according to Muniz. A user would choose keywords he or she would like information on so updates can be more specific to what the user wants.

For example, if a user is interested in information on liquor licenses or development projects in a specific neighborhood, the user could subscribe to receive alerts about those topics, Muniz said. So if a new liquor license or development project was about to be approved in given area, the user would receive a text message update.

Gov 2.0 Radio Founder Adriel Hampton participated in the hackathon and said another notable app built during the event can be used to show pending and planned timber harvest in California. Data points from the [THP \[timber harvest plan\] Tracking Center](#), a website that provides access to California’s timber plans, were pulled together and fed into Google maps to provide a better visualization of which plots of land are going to be harvested.

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So will these apps become a reality to the general public? Muniz said although some of the apps are more of just a concept — like the legislative alert app — he hopes by working with government agencies and holding more hackathons that apps developed at San Francisco’s hackathon and future hackathons can be made available to users.

“What we want to do is sponsor more open hack days moving forward, and it’s my hope that we would be able to introduce this kind of project again and again so it can be worked on moving forward.”

<http://www.govtech.com/e-government/SF-Hackathon-Produces-Legislative-Alert-App-Prototype.html>