

## NEW YORK CITY ANNOUNCES WINNERS OF CIVIC TECH COMPETITION TO STRENGTHEN TENANT PROTECTION RIGHTS IN UPPER MANHATTAN

*Through the NYC[x] Co-Labs program, the City awards winners \$20,000 and the chance to pilot test solutions to protect tenant's rights and prevent tenant harassment in the Inwood and Washington Heights neighborhoods in upper Manhattan*

NEW YORK — The New York City Mayor's Office of the Chief Technology Officer (MOCTO) and the New York City Economic Development Corporation (NYCEDC) together with the NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD), NYC Mayor's Office to Protect Tenants (MOPT), and the communities of Inwood and Washington Heights today announced the winners and honorable mention for the [NYC\[x\] Co-Labs Housing Rights Challenge](#), inviting innovative, tech-enabled solutions from startups, technologists, and innovators from across the globe.

The winners for the Housing Rights Challenge are [Heat Seek](#) and [JustFix.nyc](#). An honorable mention award for the Housing Rights Challenge goes to [3x3](#).

Heat Seek and JustFix.nyc will receive \$20,000 each and the opportunity to pilot test their solutions in Inwood and Washington Heights, in partnership with the MOCTO, NYCEDC, HPD, and MOPT. Heat Seek and JustFix.nyc will also gain exposure to networks of NYC city agencies and receive guidance and support throughout the monitoring, evaluation, design and implementation of the pilot project. Throughout the duration of the pilot, MOCTO, NYCEDC, HPD, and MOPT will evaluate the solutions' efficacy in meeting the Challenge's goals and determine next steps, which may include releasing an open solicitation to deploy the solution on a larger scale.

"Communities know best what their highest priority needs are and the NYC[x] Co-Labs Housing Rights Challenge leverages that community knowledge to create real-world results for these residents," said **Deputy Mayor for Operations Laura Anglin**. "The City of New York congratulates winners Heat Seek and JustFix.nyc and honorable mention awardee 3x3, all of whom are creating impactful solutions for New Yorkers."

"Arming renters with knowledge and tools is critical to addressing housing insecurity, especially as our city grows and evolves," said **Deputy Mayor for Housing and Economic Development Vicki Been**. "Congratulations and thank you to Heat Seek and JustFix.nyc for their work to advance tenants' protections using technology."

"At a time when many New Yorkers are facing housing insecurity, the NYC[x] Co-Labs Housing Rights Challenge brings together community leaders, local startups, and government agencies to protect and support tenants' fundamental rights," said **John Paul Farmer, Chief Technology Officer of New York City**. "The City was impressed by the innovative and inclusive solutions proposed by challenge winners Heat Seek and JustFix.nyc and by honorable mention awardee 3x3. We look forward to working with Heat Seek and JustFix.nyc to pilot their innovative solutions and to collaborating with partners in Inwood and Washington Heights to ensure that the effort generates the greatest possible impact for the community. Cross-sector

collaboration is the key; NYC[x] Co-Labs moves us forward better by moving forward together.”

“As Heat Season gets underway and we continue to grapple with the impacts of the pandemic, we’re grateful for additional tools to help protect tenants and hold landlords accountable,” said **HPD Commissioner Louise Carroll**. “Congratulations to Heat Seek, JustFix.nyc, and the other Housing Rights Challenge finalists for rising to the occasion and introducing new tools to advance the city's efforts to keep New Yorkers in safe and secure housing.”

“Building stronger communities means listening to their needs and creating solutions that deliver real impact,” said **James Patchett, president and CEO of New York City Economic Development Corporation**. “Over the years, it’s been a pleasure supporting Heat Seek through our NYC Big Apps program. We’re excited to see Heat Seek and JustFix.nyc advance their technology to protect tenants.”

“COVID-19 has exacerbated the challenges tenants face in their lives, from experiencing tenant harassment to the fear of being evicted in the middle of a pandemic” said **Ricardo Martínez Campos, Deputy Director for the Mayor’s Office to Protect Tenants**. “We need to act fast and deliberately to develop and implement new creative solutions for tenants and tenant advocates so that everyone is protected. We are thrilled to partner with Heat Seek and JustFix to help the community hold bad landlords accountable in the Inwood and Washington Heights neighborhoods.”

“1 in 2 renters in Inwood and Washington Heights spend more than 50% of their income in rent, at the very least they deserve their rights to be respected and not to be harassed by abusive landlords.” Said **Oscar J. Romero Jr., Program Director, NYC[x] Co-Labs, MOCTO**. “The NYC[x] Co-Labs Housing Rights Challenge is an example of how global innovation can be leveraged to address pressing local challenges while empowering community members”

“NYC[x] Co-Labs emphasizes community-driven decision-making by convening innovators, local government and residents to solve problems together,” said **Shanna Crumley, Innovation Advisor for NYC[x] Co-Labs, MOCTO**. “Heat Seek and JustFix.nyc will both positively impact lives across Inwood and Washington Heights and enable current and future New Yorkers to claim their rights.”

### **Winners: Heat Seek & JustFix.nyc**

Heat Seek’s innovative temperature sensors and data analysis help New York City tenants and organizers collect actionable data to back up heat complaints to advocate for safe and fair living conditions. Lack of heat is the #1 complaint to 311 during the winter, but it’s difficult to hold landlords accountable. During the 2019-2020 heat season, Inwood and Washington Heights registered 11,954 heat complaints, the highest number of any area in the city, making it an ideal place to begin for Heat Seek’s pilot.

JustFix.nyc proposed an SMS-based tool which tenants can use to connect with existing JustFix.nyc resources, enabling them to take action against landlord harassment, wrongful

eviction, and any other housing issues they might face. The platform also provides a low-tech space for community members to share information, connect with tenant advocates, and organize.

### **About Heat Seek**

Heat Seek builds innovative technology to support New York City tenants. Since their founding, they've played a dual role as both a tech startup and a mission driven nonprofit helping tenants, community organizers, and lawyers use data to tell stories about housing mismanagement. They seek out areas in which the lack of available data leaves the city unable to enforce its laws effectively, and courts unable to hold bad landlords accountable. Heat Seek focuses on building low-cost, web-connected temperature sensors and a companion web application to help tenants prove serious and persistent lack of heat in their apartments. They analyze both temperature data and citywide data to provide new ways for advocates to target and reach at-risk tenants. Heat Seek believes that technology is a powerful tool to confront our city's worst landlords, keeping tenants in their homes and preserving affordable housing.

“Heat Seek is thrilled to be named a winner of the NYC[x] Co-Labs Housing Rights Challenge,” said **Noelle Francois, Executive Director at Heat Seek**. “We look forward to supporting the tenants, housing organizers, and legal service providers of Inwood and Washington Heights in asserting their right to affordable housing that is safe, healthy, and dignified. At a time when many of us are staying indoors due to Covid-19, no New Yorker should have to suffer through a winter in an underheated apartment. We're ready to help our neighbors use cutting edge technology to gather the data they need to hold their bad landlords accountable and ensure that their homes remain a respite from the cold this winter.”

### **About JustFix.nyc**

Justfix.nyc develops data-driven tools that provide tenants and community advocates with the resources they need to create safe and healthy homes for all New Yorkers. They use technology to break down barriers in the housing system and empower underrepresented tenants to take action against landlord harassment, wrongful eviction, and other housing issues. Justfix.nyc aims to strengthen existing tenant support systems and energize a tenant movement to provide housing for all by making their data and technology easily accessible. They work closely with community partners and the housing justice movement to advocate for systemic change by leveraging their resources and large-scale data analysis.

“JustFix.nyc is honored to be a winner of the NYC[x] Co-Labs Housing Rights Challenge. The Challenge will support our mission to co-design tools to fight displacement, and make them more culturally accessible, relevant, and specific to the housing justice community in Inwood and Washington Heights,” said **Georges Clement, Executive Director of JustFix.nyc**. “We look forward to leveraging this opportunity to protect tenants during an increasingly complicated time.”

### **Honorable Mention: 3x3**

An honorable mention award for the NYC[x] Co-Labs Inwood Housing Rights Challenge is 3x3 Design. The judging panel was impressed with 3x3 Design, who provided well thought out, culturally competent proposals. 3x3 Design proposed an SMS-based tool to build capacity among community organizers and allow easy information sharing among community members facing housing issues. The tool includes translation services, considerable space for community feedback and involvement, and does not require significant digital literacy or training to be implemented.

## About the Challenge

[The NYC\[x\] Co-labs: Accessible Mental Health Challenge](#) and [the NYC\[x\] Co-labs: Housing Rights Challenge](#) emerged from a series of participatory workshops with community experts from Inwood and Washington Heights. In August 2018, The NYC[x] Co-Labs Program engaged 35 Inwood/Washington Heights residents, representatives of community-based organizations, entrepreneurs and educators in a series of workshops on housing, education, health, arts & culture, small businesses, and immigrant affairs to identify priority issues in the community. This research was complemented with six one-on-one interviews with local healthcare professionals and stakeholders, one workshop with local tenant organizers, 191 relevant data points from the [OneNYC challenge survey](#), expert interviews, a literature review, and participatory workshops with NYC City agencies.

## About NYC[x] Co-Labs

**Current sites:** Inwood & Washington Heights in Manhattan, and Brownsville in Brooklyn

### Community partners in Brownsville: 25

Agency partners:

**MOCJ, DSNY, DOT, NYCHA**

Participatory workshops: 8

Innovation Challenges: 2

Youth trained on STEAM: 59

Philanthropic Funds Raised: **\$200K**

### Community partners in Inwood: 35

Agency partners:

**ThriveNYC, MOPT, HPD**

Participatory workshops: 6

Innovation Challenges: 2

Youth trained on STEAM: 20

Philanthropic Funds Raised: **\$150K**

Originally known as The Neighborhood Innovation Labs, and announced by the White House as part of the [Obama administration's "Smart Cities Initiative" in 2015](#), NYC[x] Co-Labs is a

partnership between The Mayor’s Office of the Chief Technology Officer (MOCTO) and NYC Economic Development Corporation (NYCEDC). The program brings together a set of partners — from government, local non-profit organizations, technology companies, foundations — through various events, workshops, and community spaces to accelerate research and development of new technologies that can improve city life.

The backbone of the program is the Community Tech Board, composed of service providers, advocates, tech professionals, academia, government agencies, and community leaders at each NYC[x] Co-Labs site. They channel their expertise to identify and research community priorities—pressing local concerns that may benefit from urban tech solutions. Wherever a Co-Lab is set up, a group of community-based organizations are assembled to define local programming. The community’s self-identified priorities become the foundation for NYC[x] Co-Labs Challenges, calling on tech companies, entrepreneurs, non-profits, and independent innovators to propose tech-based pilot projects that can be deployed to solve real-world problems. Further, the NYC[x] Co-Labs team co-designs with the Community Tech Board Skill Development programs to create pathways for young people in each site to join, and enhance, New York City’s thriving digital economy while also uplifting their local community.

### **About the New York City Mayor’s Office of the Chief Technology Officer**

Our mission is to ensure that technology is inclusive, accessible, human-centered, and works for all New Yorkers. We view technology as a critical tool for making New York City the fairest big city in America. Our work is organized around four pillars: Universal Broadband, ensuring high-quality, affordable internet for all New Yorkers; Inclusive Innovation, making New York City the place where new ideas are applied to improve lives; Digital Services, delivering government services online to make government work better for everyone; and Emerging Tech & Society; advancing laws, rules, and plans that promote the public good and protect New Yorkers’ digital rights. Learn more at [nyc.gov/tech](http://nyc.gov/tech).

### **About the New York City Economic Development Corporation**

NYCEDC works to make New York City’s neighborhoods and economy stronger and more inclusive. We’re working with and for communities, putting New Yorkers’ needs before everything else. For us, economic development is about more than just the bottom line—it’s about human impact. That’s why we are investing in the jobs, industries, and communities that will drive New York’s economic future and make our city stronger, safer, and more equitable.

### **About the Department of Housing Preservation and Development**

Preserving affordable housing means making sure homes that are affordable now, stay affordable into the future. And in the midst of a housing crisis that is pricing New Yorkers out of their neighborhoods, it's one of our best tools to keep people in their homes. Preservation has always been at the heart of HPD's work and is the cornerstone of the Mayor's Housing New York plan. Our efforts to preserve affordable housing include working with non-profits to acquire buildings and maintain affordability, providing tax exemptions and homeowner repair loans, energy-efficiency updates, and more. Learn more about HPD's Preservation programs.

**About the Mayor's Office to Protect Tenants**

The Mayor's Office to Protect Tenants (MOPT) was created on January 10, 2019 when Mayor Bill de Blasio signed into law Executive Order No. 39, establishing an office to coordinate the City's range of tenant protection efforts. Our first Director, Jackie Bray, started in May 2019. MOPT is a core part of the City's strategy to confront the affordable housing crisis. This newly established office will work across City agencies to make existing anti-harassment and anti-displacement programs better and create new strategies to root out abuse.

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