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**NEW YORK CITY CELEBRATES FIRST COHORT OF NYC[x]
INNOVATION FELLOWS, HARNESSING DIGITAL
EXPERTISE FOR COVID-19 RESPONSE AND RACIAL
EQUITY INITIATIVES**

The first cohort of fourteen highly skilled technologists conducted an eight-week sprint to rapidly develop new digital products to lower language barriers, fight hate crimes, and drive digital equity

NEW YORK-- Mayor Bill de Blasio, Deputy Mayor Laura Anglin, and Chief Technology Officer John Paul Farmer celebrated the successful completion of the first cohort of a new technology fellowship program: the NYC[x] Innovation Fellows. The program was created in the summer of 2020 to build capacity to create new digital solutions to meet surge needs for COVID-19 response and to implement racial equity & inclusion initiatives that will be critical to New York City's recovery.

"We are honored to see so many dedicated technologists step up to work on behalf of New York City," **said Mayor Bill de Blasio**. "With technology products that work to combat hate crimes, lower language barriers, and drive digital equity, the work of the NYC[x] Innovation Fellows will have a lasting impact on improving New Yorkers' lives."

"Technology can be a powerful tool to help our City better serve New Yorkers," **said Deputy Mayor Laura Anglin**. "By launching the NYC[x] Innovation Fellows program, the Mayor's Office of the Chief Technology Officer has shown that it is eminently possible to harness technology for specific, rapid solutions. We commend the NYC[x] Innovation Fellows for their contributions to our City."

"The NYC[x] Innovation Fellows represent the best of civic technology," **said New York City Chief Technology Officer John Paul Farmer**. "Leveraging the goodwill, dedication, and expertise of technologists across the country, the NYC[x] Innovation Fellows program shows how city governments can embrace innovative and agile methods to make tangible technology products quickly and effectively. We are inspired by and grateful for all of the Fellows' groundbreaking work and know that New Yorkers will benefit for years to come from the products they have created."

The NYC[x] Innovation Fellows (NYC[x]IF) program is led by the Mayor's Office of the Chief Technology Officer's (NYC CTO) under the direction of Deputy Chief Technology Officers Katherine Benjamin and Alexis Wichowski, in partnership with U.S. Digital Response (USDR), which is a volunteer-run non-profit focused on helping governments meet the challenges presented by the COVID-19 crisis. Key partners for Cohort 1 include the Mayor's Office for the

Prevention of Hate Crimes (OPHC) in the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice (MOCJ), and the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA).

Following on the success of the program, NYC CTO is partnering with USDR to launch NYC[x]IF Cohort 2, running from November 2020 into January 2021. Agencies interested in being considered for an NYC[x]IF team can learn more about the program at nyc.gov/assets/cto/#/project/nyc-x-innovation-fellows. Technologists interested in applying to serve as NYC[x] Innovation Fellows can indicate interest at usdigitalresponse.org.

Cohort 1

The inaugural cohort of NYC[x] Innovation Fellows projects included:

- **Hate Crimes Prevention Dashboard:** Tracking hate crimes across New York City to better identify trends that can help address and prevent systemic issues. Fellows team: Rei Tran, Brandon Forant, Dhivya Ravindran, Caitlin Winner. NYC CTO lead: Shanna Crumley; Technical advisor: Wayne Chang. Agency champions: Hassan Naveed, Abdul Rad.
- **Continuous Translation:** Lowering language barriers by creating continuous, multilingual machine learning-based translations. Fellows team: Steven Young, Aditya Sridhar, Shannon Ladymon, Jared Lieberman, Matt Silver. NYC CTO leads: Rapi Castillo; Technical advisor: Justin Isaf Man. Agency champions: Santiago Torres, Ken Lo.
- **Broadband Asset Map:** Driving digital equity by mapping existing and potential assets to support universal broadband and 5G. Fellows team: Meg Towle, Jeremy Nieman, Yaniv Goldobin. NYC CTO lead: Alexis Wichowski; Design Leads: Mayo Nissen, Elyse Voegeli. Agency champions: Chad Wilson, Jen Noborikawa.

The first cohort was staffed by fourteen technologists divided into three teams, each working in an eight-week sprint. The inaugural cohort of NYC[x] Innovation Fellows are:

- **Aditya Sridhar** is passionate about building software that is publicly owned and operated. He is employed as a backend engineer at Pillarlife.com and lives in Jersey City.
- **Brandon Forant** is a New York City based product designer and entrepreneur that spent his career cultivating digital experiences for early-stage startups.
- **Caitlin Winner** works on Facebook Groups and has a passion for bringing the world closer together.
- **Dhivya Ravindran** is a data scientist and machine learning engineer. She has built products like the world's first Interest Rate Deviation Engine for banking products and Product Ranking & Recommender Algorithms for e-Commerce.

- **Jared Lieberman** Jared is a data scientist interested in the intersection of technology and public service delivery. He currently lives in Cambridge, MA and works for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.
- **Jeremy Neiman** is a software engineer at Sidewalk Labs. Before that he was a data scientist at The New York City Department of Sanitation and software engineer for IBM Smarter Cities.
- **Jessica Cole** is an administrator at U.S. Digital Response and the lead for the NYC[x] Fellowship Program. She formerly served as Head of Innovation for the City of Walnut Creek and as a Fellow at Code for America and The Aspen Institute.
- **Matt Silver** is a civic-minded technologist and data enthusiast. He is currently a Data Engineer at Disney.
- **Meg Towle** helps organizations design strategies for data use and reporting. She is currently a founding partner at North Third.
- **Rei Tran** has a background in management consulting, technology strategy, and product management. She is passionate about utilizing data to empower equitable and ethical decision-making for governments and nonprofits.
- **Shannon Ladymon** is a natural language/machine learning engineer and passionate about access and ethics in AI.
- **Steven Young** is an engineering manager and software engineer. He worked at Facebook and Google and has a Computer Science degree from Stanford. He lives in Manhattan on the Upper West Side. He provides volunteer tech assistance to many NYC community groups.
- **Wayne Chang** is an engineer and entrepreneur. He founded several New York-based software startups and is currently the CEO of Spruce Systems, Inc. He works on decentralized identity standards at W3C, and volunteers for civic causes.
- **Yaniv Goldobin** is a software engineer employed at Crunchbase in San Francisco, California. He is passionate about using technology for art and public service.

Partnership with US Digital Response

The experienced, senior-level NYC[x] Innovation Fellows were selected in partnership with U.S. Digital Response (USDR), an all-volunteer technologist collective founded in March 2020 by former U.S. Deputy CTOs and seasoned tech industry veterans to help governments respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. The NYC CTO team has been working with USDR technologist teams, led by Jessica Cole, on COVID-related projects since April 2020. The NYC[x] Innovation Fellows program expands on this successful partnership to embed technologist teams in City agencies for eight-week sprints, with the output being a technology product that provides immediate value to the agency.

“At U.S. Digital Response, we give experienced technologists an opportunity to give back by working directly with government teams to improve the systems we all rely on,” said **Raylene Yung, CEO of U.S. Digital Response**. “Partnering with New York City on this fellowship program allows teams to work side-by-side with innovative city employees to provide even deeper support on critical issues. We are hopeful that this creative, collaborative approach toward solving problems will encourage other governments to adapt a similar model.”

“Crisis response can bring out the best in people and in government,” said **Jessica Cole, Projects Team Lead for U.S. Digital Response for the NYC[x] Innovation Fellows**. “We’ve been inspired by New York City’s approach to connecting the city’s talented public servants with volunteers from U.S. Digital Response to creatively and quickly build tools that residents need. We were thrilled to partner with the city in this new program, and we stand ready to lend a hand in all communities who could use it”

"Data plays a critical role in how we as a City can address and prevent hate crimes so that all New Yorkers can feel safe within their communities," said **Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes Executive Director Deborah Lauter**. "We're grateful to the NYC[x] Innovation Fellows for lending their inventive spirits and talents to the fight against hate."

“This program brought together the best and brightest minds to create innovative, tech-driven approaches to eliminating language barriers at a time when reaching all communities with information in the languages they speak has never been more crucial,” said **May Malik, Deputy Commissioner for the Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs**. “We commend the hard work of the Fellows and are looking forward to future collaborations to advance language access in our city.”

“U.S. Digital Response represents the very best of civic tech, connecting dedicated technologist volunteers with government agencies who greatly benefit from their expertise,” said **Alexis Wichowski, Deputy CTO for Inclusive Innovation**. “New York City is extremely grateful for their partnership both during the height of the pandemic in the spring, and now, with this formal program: the NYC[x] Innovation Fellows. We look forward to continued collaboration with both USDR and the committed volunteers of the NYC[x]IF program.”

“The need for well-designed digital services has never been so important as during COVID-19, when many New Yorkers engage with the world—including government—primarily through online interactions,” said **Katherine Benjamin, Deputy CTO for Digital Services**. “OPHC, MOCJ and MOIA illustrate that by embracing the culture, processes and practices of the digital-

era, government teams can build cost-effective digital services that feel simple, seamless and intuitive.

About the 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.

About U.S. Digital Response

USDR helps governments meet the challenges of the COVID-19 crisis by strengthening decision-making and supporting their ability to effectively deliver critical services to the public at scale. USDR's team members are skilled workers and experts who volunteer their time to help governments respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. While with USDR, volunteers do not use their volunteer efforts to further personal and professional interests. Public interest projects belong in the public domain, so USDR abides by a set of [Data and Software Guidelines](#) that promote openness and accessibility. Technologists interested in joining U.S. Digital Response can learn more at USDigitalResponse.org.

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