

Developers and coders help the government at #GovHackSA

#GovHackSA was held recently at the BandwidthBarn in Woodstock, Cape Town and was a free, day-long coding marathon for developers and coders to create new and novel solutions to problems supplied to by the Western Cape government (Department of Economic Development & Tourism, and Department of Education), City of Cape Town and Wesgro.



The stimulus for the event was a need expressed by Alan Winde, MEC for Finance in the Western Cape government, and taken forward by the volunteer GovHackSA team.

There were four challenges. Each participant could choose which challenge they wanted to work on and teams were formed organically. Some chose to jump right into coding while others brainstormed ideas. At 1pm, Justin Coetzee of GoMetro shared his experiences as a start-up in getting access to government work (PRASA/Metrorail), explained how government procurement processes worked and shared his journey. Then it was back to work for the teams.

More than 40 enthusiastic community members supported the day.

The challenges were set and the teams formed:

- **Challenge One:** IT & Education. Create a leader board competition for high school students that take an online quiz to test their problem solving ability. The aim is to improve problem-solving skills and identify learners with the potential to become software developers and follow a career in IT. The problem was posed by Max Brock, Western Cape IT curriculum advisor and CapaCITI1000, a Cape IT Initiative to grow the pool of IT skills. Three teams worked on this problem, adopting very different approaches, which included customising existing Drupal modules, building on top of tech already developed by Bandwidth Barn start-up iFunda, and another approach by a UWC team.

- **Challenge Two:** Events App. The challenge was based on a problem pitched by the Wesgro CEO, Nils Flaatten. He needed an events app that could solve a challenge with proactively gathering data and post-event information from social media on particular of all the events held in the Western Cape.
- **Challenge Three:** "Fix my street". The challenge was to create a local version of "FixMyStreet" where you can report issues from potholes to broken lights, which can notify the corresponding councillor and streamline service delivery. Thembinkosi Siganda of Economic Development at the City of Cape Town highlighted the city's commitment to the IT start-up community via the Bandwidth Barn. The team grappled with the challenge that the open-source "FixMyStreet" code they planned to build on top of was developed in Perl and not in PHP as anticipated.
- **Challenge Four:** Fix my Red Tape. Create an app that assists the Western Cape government in delivering on its "Red Tape to Red Carpet" promise to reduce red tape. The goal was to create an app that allows business owners to report challenges with red tape, for example getting tax clearance certificates, via social media and "in the moment". This will assist the Department of Economic Development in getting data on what the problems are. The intention would be to then integrate this into the Red Tape to Red Carpet Call Centre to follow up.

According to Cape IT Initiative's executive director, Jenny McKinnell: "The goal of GovHackSA is not to create a fully working application on one the day, but rather to make a positive start and, more importantly, to help the government see that the local Western Cape IT community can develop applications that help the government solve its problems using software. Ultimately, though, the goal is to begin to build a co-operative, collaborative relationship between the Cape IT community and local and regional government that will create the win-win of government getting software that helps solve their problems in meeting citizens' needs and the start-up community getting access to government data and access to the government as a customer."

The Judging panel consisted of Andy Volk (Mxit) and Lelany Sommers (Blackberry), with input from Jenny McKinnell (CITI) (although she didn't vote). The team that won was "Fix my Red Tape". The winning group consisted of Tony Mwebaze, Peter Phillip and Timothy Mchabeleng. The runners-up were from "Events App" (that "eventthing") - Tim, Tracey, Philip and Jonathan.

There was a draw for attendance sponsored by Blackberry. Three Blackberry Playbook tablets were won by Tracey Baving, Kholofelo Moyaba and Motse Lehata.

Making a difference

The winners won the opportunity to expand on their application with the government, be fast tracked into the Mxit Kick-start programme (if they develop their app on the Mxit platform), entry into Start-Up weekend (which happens at the BandwidthBarn from 17 to 19 November) and the possibility of collaborating with the government in making a difference as to how services are delivered to citizens.

The #GovHackSA Hackathon provided a great environment for developers to compete amongst each other, understand the government's challenges, learn from one another, experiment with building on existing code and APIs, and see how fast they can develop applications, said Lianne du Toit, organiser of #GovHackSA.

We are looking at hosting more #GovHackSA events, which give like-minded programmers, developers, designers and coders an opportunity to meet each other and learn about the challenges of the government and helping to solve them.

If you would like to know more about #GovHackSa or get involved, mail info@govhacksa.co.za. The next Hackathon will be run in the first quarter of 2013.