

CODE *for* America

#cfa2012

<!-- WE'RE GROWING -->

Year after year, municipalities both large and small have to do more with less. As obvious with budget cuts at all levels, the result affects not only finances but people as well. As our nations general demographic ages, we will feel the impact of up to 60 percent of city government workforce retiring in the next five years.

However, as James Russell Lowell aptly quipped, “Mishaps are like knives, that either serve us or cut us, as we grasp them by the blade or by the handle.” Using this unusual opportunity to refresh focus is key to the goals of a new organization called Code for America (CFA).

Much like its inspiration Teach for America, CFA supports and pays for 20 fellows who are young or experienced web programmers, graphic designers, business analysts, project managers and interface specialists working for eleven months as a team for eight

cities across the U.S. on projects earmarked towards making government more open, efficient and responsive.

Founder Jennifer Pahlka explains, “Code for America is building a network of city leaders who believe there is a better way of doing things, and the program involves both formal and informal channels to share ideas and lessons learned. We’re also working more robust channels for sharing applications and setting technology standards across cities.”

Balancing the technical details of programming with the ideals of cooperation and easy access, fellows for CFA focus on projects brought to the table by selected cities. Projects are chosen by seeing what need can be solved in a year’s time of coding, plus what follows the goals of CFA in terms

of information to the public. Fellows also engage with community groups and universities for both researching and directing focus as well as finding innovative ways to sustain programs.

Code is lightweight, web based and designed for

compatibility on mobile devices, from smart phones to tablets. Remarkably these apps are designed with scalability of user interface... the look and feel work well on handhelds as well as regular computer screens.

Projects are chosen by seeing what need can be solved in a year’s time of coding, plus what follows the goals of CFA in terms of bringing a high level of access of information to the public.

What are the results?

For example, in 2011 fellows programmed “Snapfresh,” an app free for the public to find grocery stores in their area that accept SNAP cards, a/k/a food stamps. Another popular app developed for the Boston School district called, “Where’s my school bus?” allows parents to locate on their phones exactly where their children are.

Modeling after another successful organization, CFA mimics Google’s philosophy of “Labs Friday,” a designation of 20 percent time where fellows can work on any civic application or design of their choice. This innovative technique has revolutionized the way the tech industry plans their time and resources. In 2011, projects like [ArtMapper](#) and [Reroute.it](#) sprouted from “Labs Friday.”



What about support?

Cities are not left hanging with an unsupported app at the end of the project. The brilliant idea of continual development is built-in as peers find and structure the concept from its origin with local resources, such as community organizations or local universities. In addition, a sister organization called Civic Commons [civiccommons.org] tracks 236 applications in 92 cities as a feedback follow up to CFA's projects. Code sharing and information is supported for Web and iPhone/Android apps. Other related organizations like OpenPlans.org take development to a specific level, such as a transportation integration platform built to track real-time subway and bus arrivals.

What lasting value did the program bring in its year of inception?

Just ask its benefactors. "From Code for America we thought we'd just get some cool apps for our constituents, but we got so much more; new relationships in City Hall, new connections to the community, a platform for further innovation, and yes, even some great applications," recalls Nigel Jacob from 2011 partner, the city of Boston. But value was seen beyond just program participants. A hint of how big this idea is, CFA has some reputable backing in tech and civics as Sponsors: Knight Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, O'Reilly Media, ESRI, Microsoft, Google, Nike, EMC, Cisco, Yahoo, and LinkedIn just to name a few.

In addition to coding apps, fellows are also available for side projects in the city that would be difficult to move forward through standard channels. "The city leadership and the fellows can function as an ad hoc innovation team, collaborating on a series of interesting experiments throughout the year, all of which will be shared with the other cities," boast the program's innovators.

How can Kansas municipalities benefit?

Deadline for applications to be a 2013 CFA City is March 15. But no worry if you missed it – or even lack aspiration or funding to be a selected city. Municipalities can still use apps developed in prior years, as the code is open source and supported by the organization. CFA staff also works with county governments and cities to help them adapt code for their needs.

from codeforamerica.org

Jennifer Pahlka is the founder, executive director and board chair of Code for America. Previously, she ran the Web 2.0 and Gov 2.0 events for TechWeb, in conjunction with O'Reilly Media, and co-chaired the successful Web 2.0 Expo. Before that, she spent eight years at CMP Media where she ran the Game Developers Conference, Game Developer magazine, and Gamasutra.com; there she also launched the Independent Games Festival and served as Executive Director of the International Game Developers Association. Jennifer's early career was spent in the non-profit sector. She is a graduate of Yale University and lives in Oakland, California with her daughter and five chickens.

Since 1997, Jen Sharp (JenSharp.com) has served business and government across Kansas and the US and even internationally, specializing in Web development, design & programming including e-Learning, ecommerce, content management systems, and other small business solutions.



HOA SOLUTIONS Hydro Optimization & Automation Solutions
 5701 North 58th Street
 Lincoln, Nebraska 68507

Control System Integrators

SCADA Telemetry Instrumentation VFD's
 Water Waste Water

WWW.HOA-Solutionsinc.com Phone: 402-467-3750
 Email: Sales@HOA-Solutionsinc.com Fax: 402-467-1568
 Lincoln, Chris, Andrew, Mitch, Randy, Joel, Troy and Debi

Babco Valves

No Freeze Since 1948

Hydrant pressure relief valves
 Patricia Baburek, owner

141 S. 3rd St.
 Plattsmouth, NE 68048
 402-296-4155
 Fax: 402-296-4082
 Email: babcovalves@alltel.net

PITTSBURG TANK & TOWER MAINTENANCE CO., INC.

SAVE! We have a crew in YOUR AREA!

ROV inspections can be viewed on TV console during inspection & DVD provided. All inspections include bound reports, recommendations and cost estimates.

Inspections: Wet, Dry, ROV (Robotic)
 Repair: In Service Cleaning, Paint, Insulation, API
 New & Used: Relocation Erectors, Dismantles, Mixing System
 Tanks: Elevated, Underground, Ground Storage

Hugh McGee
 270-826-9000 Ext. 330
 www.watertank.com

GWA

316-262-3322
 cell 316/655-4959
 fax 316/201-1998

Ground Water Associates, Inc.
 EXPERTISE IN WATER & WELLS

1999 N. AMIDON ST., STE. 218
 WICHITA, KANSAS 67203

ROBERT L. VINCENT, C.P.G., P.Hg.
 GROUND WATER GEOLOGIST

P.O. Box 3834
 WICHITA, KANSAS 67201