



TRAINING THE NEXT GENERATION
OF PUBLIC PROBLEM-SOLVERS
govlabacademy.org



The GovLab Academy

DECEMBER 2012 – DECEMBER 2015

GOVLABACADEMY.ORG

The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation awarded The GovLab a grant to develop a multi-school, multi-discipline network of students, faculty, and professionals working to design and implement ways of using technology for citizen engagement. The goal of our efforts has been to train public problem-solvers – what we call public entrepreneurs – to use technology to create implementable projects with and for the public. Primary activities under the grant included the design of a curriculum and platform for helping participants take a civic engagement project from idea to implementation; pilot delivery of the program in both extended and intensive formats; and the successful preparation for launch over the life of the grant of at least 30 new projects involving citizen engagement. Since the inception of the grant we have carried out activities that exceed the performance metrics to which we committed.

In this final report and the attached slide deck, we share what we have learned about the demand for new approaches for solving public problems and how to meet that demand using online learning. We do not measure success by levels of enrollment but by the impact participant projects have created.

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Results Achieved to Date

TRAINING THE NEXT GENERATION OF PUBLIC PROBLEM-SOLVERS

Over the last three years, in a series of Masters-level academic courses and online and offline workshops and coaching programs, the GovLab and its network of 25 world-class instructors and coaches and over 100 mentors have trained **446 participants** in more than a dozen US cities and thirty foreign countries to take a public interest technology project from idea to implementation.

Academy offerings included:

COACHING PROGRAMS

Online coaching sessions for those involved with a civic tech project. Sessions meet every week for 4-5 weeks or every other week for 8-10 weeks. Limited to 10 teams or individuals.

WORKSHOPS

Intensive, in person 1-3 day substantive introductions to support teams about to start or already engaged at a specific stage of a civic innovation project.

COURSES AND PROJECT CLINICS

Masters and professional-level project-based courses and clinics focused on the innovative application of civic technology to public problems. Online or blended delivery.

In contrast with a 2-10% MOOC completion rate, **90% of the Academy participants finish**. Over **99% of participants surveyed said** they would recommend the training to a friend.

Under the auspices of several professional schools at NYU as well as MIT and Arizona State University, we delivered 12 semester-long Masters-level academic courses against a target of 11 courses. We also provided 16 “intensive” deliveries (coaching programs and workshops) of our core offering, against a committed target of eight such deliveries. In particular, 1-3 day intensive workshops on “problem definition” and “problem solving” served over 100 individuals with more than 20 different specific projects.

CONVENING WORLD-CLASS COACHES

In line with our commitment to develop a multi-school and multi-discipline network of faculty, we have created a community of 25 world-class instructors and coaches from five different universities as well as a wide variety of government and public sector organizations. Examples include Professor Karim Lakhani, Harvard Business School, and the world's leading expert on prize-backed challenges, coaching participants on prize design; the heads of MaRS Lab in Toronto and NESTA in London coaching a dozen would-be creators of new public innovation labs; Julian Carver, former CIO, Christ Church, New Zealand, leading a coaching program on disaster management; Professor Beth Simone Noveck and Tiago Peixoto, World Bank, coaching local officials to design effective local citizen engagement projects; and Dr. Alan Kantrow, former head of Knowledge Management, McKinsey, providing project management coaching to all participants.

TACKLING BIG PROBLEMS WITH AGILE EXPERTISE

We used the coaching infrastructure to issue curated calls for assistance to global experts in order to help the City of Quito prepare for the possible explosion of the Cotopaxi volcano. By assembling dozens of global experts to provide advice and mentoring online, the City has been able to develop a new suite of citizen reporting tools. Through eight online feedback meetings, the city's experts received advice and mentorship from 65 self-selected international experts and practitioners. The collective analysis of the problem produced a set of key issues and identified a single major problem: the absence of data that could fill in the information gaps and contribute to informed decisions by local officials. As a direct result of these online sessions, the Quito Innovation Lab is currently user-testing a two-way communications system between authorities and the citizenry. We are replicating the same model to help bring experts together to tackle the challenge of Zika, Dengue, Chikungunya and other mosquito borne illnesses.

MAKING PRIZE-BACKED CHALLENGES MORE EFFECTIVE

In collaboration with [One](#), the [Citizen Cyberscience Centre](#), and the [Crowdcrafting](#) platform for open research, we launched two iterations of The Open Seventeen challenge to develop and accelerate ten selected citizen science crowdsourcing projects that use open data to tackle Sustainable Development Goals. Winning projects received a customized coaching program designed to make solutions more implementable and scalable and concluded the program by being featured at [The ONE Campaign](#). We are replicating the model with more cities who want prize-backed challenges to yield more than just an app and, instead, want an effective solution to a problem.

ADVANCING LEARNING ABOUT GOVERNANCE INNOVATIONS WITH ORIGINAL VIDEOS, CURRICULA AND EVENTS

In collaboration with the Academy faculty, we added newly curated, pedagogy-friendly materials to the Academy Library, which is universally accessible at no cost. The Library now houses six major and 14 smaller modules (against a committed target of nine). We also produced 115 intro to innovation videos that have reached over ten thousand viewers. Our syllabi on Solving Public Problems with Technology with their professionally curated readings and videos as well as Twitter lists, featuring leading voices on relevant topics, are freely available and are regularly re-used by others.

In addition, we held 25 free lunchtime conversations through the “Ideas Lunch Series” with guest speakers presenting such broad subjects as ‘the role of collective intelligence’ and ‘using big and open data to create portraits and art’. We also hosted three online conferences on the topic of open, collaborative crowdsourced lawmaking (CrowdLaw) where we convened more than 25 leading experts and practitioners from 11 different countries to discuss and exchange best practices.

DEVELOPING NEW TOOLS TO ENABLE BETTER PROBLEM SOLVING

We developed the GovLab [Academy Canvas](#). Through the Canvas, we continuously help civic entrepreneurs refine their understanding of the problem and those whom it affects; express their Big Idea; and turn that idea into an actionable real world strategy that seeks to improve people’s lives. Launched in March 2015 (and now available in Dutch, English, French, German, Italian and Spanish), more than 150 canvasses have been created, serving 963 unique users. The Canvas was featured in a NESTA publication (see [here](#)) and some of our faculty have found it so helpful that they have used it during the regular courses they teach at their respective universities.

We also created the Network of Innovators (NoI), the first skill sharing online platform that enables our alumni government and civic innovators to assess their problem-solving skills and get matched to those with complementary knowledge for mutual learning. NoI is premised on the belief that traditional titles and academic credentials do not adequately convey the skills and experiences people have and would willingly share. By promoting the exchange of knowledge about more agile, data-driven, open and collaborative approaches to working, NoI aims to enhance how we govern and solve public problems. As of today, 9,189 questions have been answered by 473 members from 48 different countries.

Designed by the GovLab in partnership with our Academy Faculty and innovators across eight countries, Noi makes it possible to:

- ▶ Track skills that you have and want to learn
- ▶ Visualize your innovation skills and compare to those of others
- ▶ Get matched with other innovators who have the knowledge you want
- ▶ Search for collaborators with specific skills
- ▶ Showcase those areas of expertise you want to share

Summary of Grant Targets

The goal of the grant was to “develop a multi-school, multi-disciplinary network of students, faculty and professionals, working together to design, build and implement ways of using technology-enabled engagement to tackle problems in our communities.”

CONTENT OUTPUTS

Content outputs emphasized both the creation of new material and the development of partnerships to create that material. Targets were developed on the assumption that the model was to produce original bundled and unbundled content to deliver via the Web. Although we shifted from a passive content delivery model to an active coaching model, we did, indeed, hit our targets with regard to content creation.

GRANT TARGETS

Eight partnerships, six modules, weekly use of content by participants. We developed six major and fourteen smaller content modules including ones on problem definition, rapid-cycle research, citizen engagement, open data, crowdsourcing and designing public labs. This content was created by, or in consultation with, 20 partners including the Citizen Cyberscience Centre, Case Commons, the Department of Better Technologies, Neo, Harvard Business School, NYU, Stanford University, the MIT Media Lab, the White House, the World Bank, Nesta and MaRS Solutions Lab. Because we developed bespoke syllabi for course participants, all of the content we developed was consumed. In addition, our videos have been viewed by over ten thousand unique viewers. We are in the process of building a unified and searchable library for all the content we've developed.

ACCELERATOR OUTPUTS

Accelerator targets emphasized number of participants and their satisfaction rate.

ACADEMY ACTIVITY	TARGET	ACHIEVED
Total number of partners (inclusive of recruitment and delivery partners)	10	10
Number of accelerator participants	400	446
Completion rate format A (originally slated to be 12 weeks, we experimented with 14, 10 and 8 week delivery formats)	90%	90%
Completion rate format B (originally slated to be 2 weeks, these were shorter format programs of 1-3 days)	80%	100%
Participants satisfied with program (format A)	75%	80%
Participants satisfied with program (format B)	75%	80%
Alumni who go on to establish user profile on community platform (Discourse)	90%	90%

COMMUNITY OUTPUTS

Community targets focused on the creation and use of a community building platform, pilot badging system, and participant satisfaction with mentoring – all designed to create a cohesive sense of membership among Academy alumni.

We used Screendoor to create skills and experience profiles for all users. We experimented with and developed a discussion platform for our community using Discourse. We built an expert network for our alumni and a broader community of governance innovators called Network of Innovators.

ACADEMY ACTIVITY	TARGET	ACHIEVED
Launch of online community platform	Community platform operational	Yes
Pilot badging system for community users	Roll out v.2 across community	Yes
Members who are active users of platform	60%	70%
Number of domain experts within community	155	468
Accelerator participants in mentoring relationship	90%	100%
Accelerator participants satisfied with mentoring experience	80%	100%

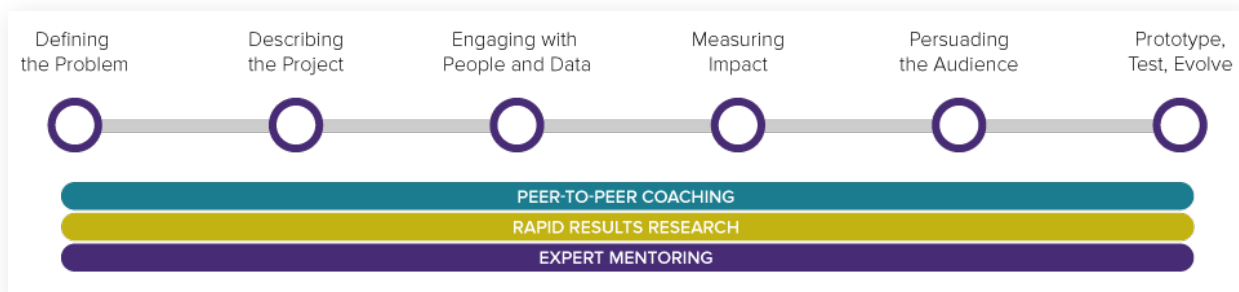
The Impact of Our Work

Unlike private sector coaching programs, such as Y-Combinator and Endeavor, that accept only a handful of entrepreneurs, the GovLab Academy strives to accelerate positive social change by mentoring a wider group of would-be innovators inside and outside of government.

Unlike a traditional accelerator, we focus only on **public entrepreneurs**, namely those working on innovative projects in the public interest. Contrary to the myth of the lone inventor in the garage, these are projects that often involve navigating bureaucracies and circumventing “no machines;” forming partnerships with other innovators, agencies and NGOs; learning laws and regulations; and collaborating with other companies and nonprofits to be effective.

Our tested pedagogy emphasizes:

- ▶ High-quality original or curated content from the best expert practitioners on topics ranging from solving problems with crowdsourcing to citizen science to social and behavioral insights to public lab design;
- ▶ Mentoring and coaching from those with a track record of managing and leading successful social change projects;
- ▶ Rigorous up-front attention to problem definition;
- ▶ Training in rapid results research to ensure a data-driven understanding of the problem;
- ▶ Human-centered and agile approaches to designing solutions;
- ▶ A well-defined curricular pathway for project development; and
- ▶ Combining subject-matter and skills-based training with peer-to-peer support.



KEY FEATURES

Problem Definition –Through the online and offline courses, online coaching program sessions and offline workshops, we introduced changemakers to the latest innovations on solving public problems with technology. This has allowed us to help them: 1) improve their project description; 2) hone their strategy to engage with people and data; 3) design a strategy to measure impact; and 4) develop persuasive materials to share their story. These efforts were instrumental in guiding participants to reflect on key issues that lead to successful and implementable projects. With real world implementation as our lodestar, we focused together on developing the essential aspects of the projects at each stage.

New Learning Model for Building Diverse Communities –The Academy deployed a new learning model based on building unique communities of passionate, like-minded, inter-generational people scattered all over the world trying to make a difference in their field of interest.

Increased Access to Expertise and Peers – For teams that work on projects based around the world, the coaching program offers an opportunity to meaningfully engage with leading experts in a given field that would not otherwise be possible. Bringing together people working on the same issues worldwide has improved the effectiveness of participant projects by providing constructive feedback on the implementation of similar projects, thus eliminating the wasted reinvention of the wheel. Additionally, by fostering a culture of collaboration (versus competition), teams with similar objectives have also ended up joining forces to work together.

What We Have Learned

LESSON 1

There is growing, and unmet, demand for training a new kind of public servant: the public entrepreneur

In response to the diverse demand from public officials, the GovLab evolved the Academy from a platform for delivering bundled and unbundled content about governance innovations, such as crowdsourcing and open data, into a hands-on program for training and coaching online and off designed to help those working in the public interest take a project from idea to implementation.

“There are serious questions about the ability of many areas of government and civil society to identify, cultivate and retain individuals with the necessary skills for success in a world increasingly driven by information technology.”

– **NetGain**

“The world’s national, state and local governments don’t have the right digital skills in the right quantities to meet the challenges of the coming century. This is a Big Problem.”

– **Tom Steinberg, founder of mySociety.org**

LESSON 2

There is a distributed supply of talent and expertise to increase learning

Unlike a traditional professional school, where participants are constrained by the limits of the faculty, an on-line training program offers a platform for making diverse know-how available across institutional boundaries.

Examples of the GovLab Academy coaches and mentors are:

- ▶ **Mike Bracken**, Chief Digital Officer of the Co-Operative Group
- ▶ **Samir K. Brahmachari**, Former Director General of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research of the Government of India
- ▶ **Brian Forde**, Director of Digital Currency, MIT Media Lab
- ▶ **Francois Grey**, Coordinator of the Citizen Cyberscience Centre, Geneva

- ▶ **Gavin Hayman**, Executive Director of the Open Contracting Partnership
- ▶ **Clay Johnson**, Chairman of The Department for Better Technology and Former Presidential Innovation Fellow
- ▶ **Karim Lakhani**, Lumry Family Associate Professor of Business Administration at the Harvard Business School
- ▶ **Amen Ra Mashariki**, Chief Analytics Officer of the City of New York
- ▶ **Geoff Mulgan**, Chief Executive of NESTA
- ▶ **Miriam Nisbet**, Former Director of the Office of Government Information Services
- ▶ **Arnaud Sahuguet**, Director of the Foundry at Cornell Tech
- ▶ **Joeri van den Steenhoven**, Co-Founder and Chief Research and Development Officer of MaRS Solutions Lab

LESSON 3

There is need for a method for training public entrepreneurs to solve public problems

Our programs offer:

- ▶ Rigorous up-front diagnosis of the team's impediments to implementation;
- ▶ Emphasis on problem definition;
- ▶ A combination of subject-matter and skills-based training with peer-to-peer support;
- ▶ Mentoring and coaching from those with a track record of leading successful social change;
- ▶ High-quality original and curated content from the best expert practitioners;
- ▶ Coaching is flexibly configured to be responsive to participants' specific challenges;
- ▶ Participants receive durable, digital certificates to demonstrate mastery;

LESSON 4

There is overwhelming demand to help public interest innovators “cross the chasm” from idea to implementation

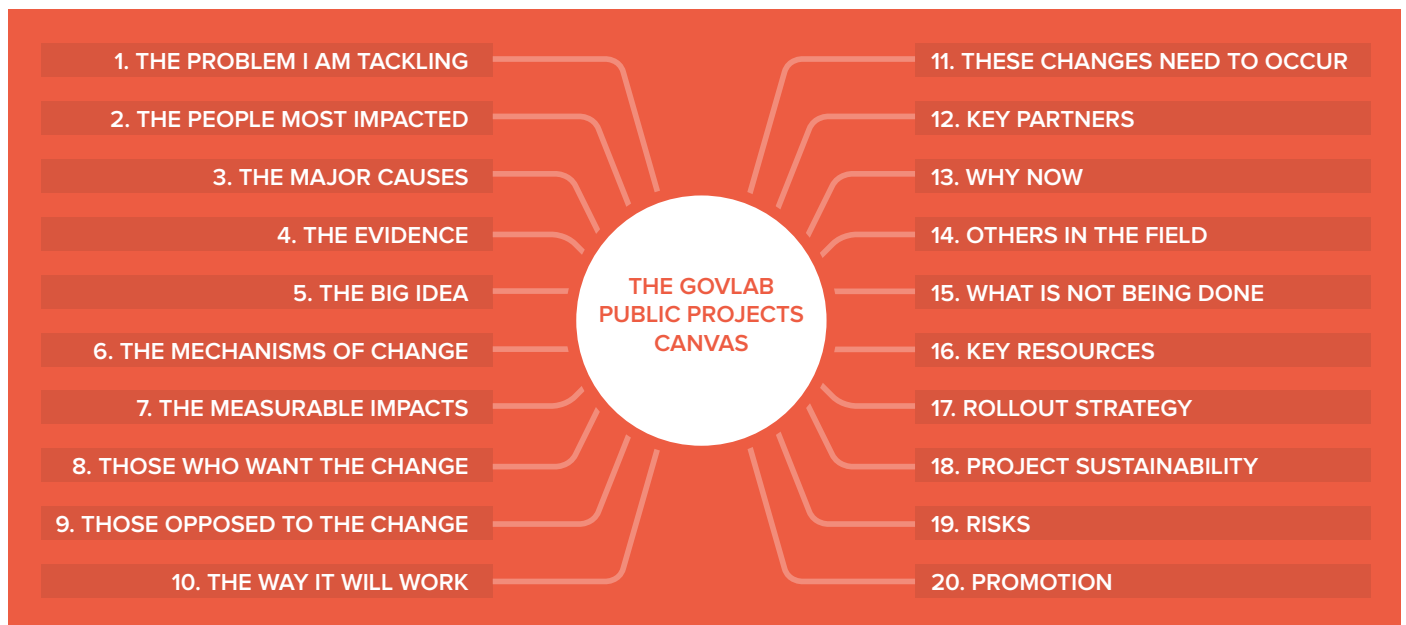
The “valley of death” is a common term in the startup world, which refers to the difficulty of covering negative cash flow in the early stages of a startup before a new product generates revenue. But when you are passionate about solving a *public problem* there are also common deathtraps.

These include:

- ▶ Defining the problem clearly enough in order to develop a solution that really works;
- ▶ Knowing how to navigate the necessary bureaucracies, legal regimes, and institutions to get things done;
- ▶ Developing materials compelling enough to persuade the “no machines” you must convince within those bureaucracies;
- ▶ Identifying how to measure what works.

Based on our experience working with Academy participants, we developed the GovLab Academy Public Problem Solving Canvas, a worksheet to help advance a public interest project from idea to implementation.

The Canvas is available in Dutch, English, French, German, Italian and Spanish and is shareable, editable and commentable by team members, peers, coaches and mentors.



LESSON 5

There is a need to teach collaboration and partnering for change

The everyone-should-have-a-startup culture has led to nonprofits that never should have been started and apps that never should have been created. By contrast, the GovLab Academy emphasizes focusing on doing what it takes to make change happen, including collaboration, partnership, and “writing the memo you want *someone else* to send.”

Peer to peer learning is a significant component of the Academy, where courses bring together a dozen teams and individuals working on a common challenge for mutual learning and support.

“Thanks again for everything. It’s been a blast and an absolute honor to be a participant [in] your program. Hope to stay involved and help however I can. Here are the recent prototypes which are a collaboration/artifact that came from the procurement workgroup.”

– Mark Hansen and Yoshi Manale, Tech Procurement Coaching Program Alumni

Mark and Yoshi met through the coaching program and decided to team up and work together on an issue about which they are both passionate.



LESSON 6

In order to be successful, public entrepreneurs must be able to define the problem—a skill widely lacking

Effective solutions are developed only when one has a clear definition of the problem to be tackled. Hence our pedagogy emphasizes problem definition and we frequently helped people rewrite their problem statements three or more times, using such tools as the GovLab Academy Canvas and The Problem Definition ToolKit.

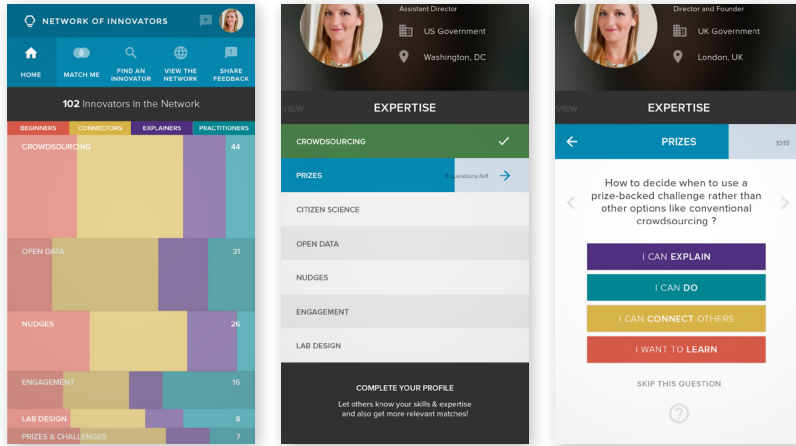
“Participating in the GovLab Academy coaching program “Leveraging Crowds in the Public Sector,” was rocket fuel to our team’s trajectory. It helped us map out a site development plan, develop a crowdsourcing strategy, and hone our vision of the content the site should feature.”

“...the idea that I designed in that class is being turned into a working product at a new hackathon for female entrepreneurs”

“If you are looking for a class that will help you think more deeply and practically about a problem you’d like to solve for, I encourage you to check out SPPT and GovLab’s other course offerings. Through the class, I learned how to better articulate a problem, communicate my ideas and generate support.”

LESSON 7

Connecting innovators and alumni with one another generates a new public infrastructure that can help solve problems more effectively



The GovLab Academy is creating a first of its kind resource to enable participants to continue to consult and learn from one another even after formal programs are finished. This expert network, called the Network of Innovators, is a skill sharing platform that matches public entrepreneurs with complementary skills for mutual learning.

LESSON 8

Pedagogical priorities include making problem solving more data driven and evidence based



Every GovLab Academy program includes a module on strategies for using data and evidence to define the problem and understand possible solutions. We developed a toolkit on Rapid Results Research to help teams get smarter faster.

LESSON 9

The demand and supply is global—requiring a global mindset and platform to learn what has worked elsewhere and why

Effective projects get developed when people learn from peers in other cities and countries. Hence we combined people together working on common problems.

For example, in a course led by Clay Johnson, teams from New York City, Mexico City, Pittsburgh and London requested to extend the program by four weeks to continue to exchange feedback and best practices as they all tried to improve their governments' tech procurement processes.

LESSON 10

Collaboration and coordination among anchor organizations is key to meeting the demand and coordinating the supply

We collaborated with many anchor organizations in the creation and delivery of the GovLab Academy, using different methods:

- ▶ **Combining Coaching and Prizes** – Working with institutional partners like One.Org, the Citizen Cyberscience Centre, and the Crowdcrafting platform, we have run coaching programs that train the winners of prize-backed challenges such as the Open Seventeen Challenge to take an innovation, like an app, from a cool tool to an implementable project. **Next up...** Coaching for City Challenges in Monterrey, México.
- ▶ **Creating New Communities of Practice** – Working with the Organization of American States, we coached their inaugural class of Latin American innovation fellows to implement their projects. We also partnered with NESTA and MindLab to coach a cohort of new public lab practitioners. **Next up...** working with the White House and the Criminal Justice Coordinating Councils to train and coach the new breed of data driven criminal justice reformers in the United States.
- ▶ **Agile Expertise** – Through a curated call for help to global experts, the GovLab coached the City of Quito to prepare for the possible explosion of the Cotopaxi volcano by assembling dozens of global experts to provide advice and mentoring, leading to the development of a new suite of citizen reporting tools. **Next up...** curated crowdsourcing of expertise to help LatAm respond to Zika in collaboration with the Inter-American Development Bank and other global health partners and to help Podemos, a Spanish political party, transition from campaigning to governing.

Participant evaluations plus the subsequent launch of many new civic projects in communities tell us that these efforts have done much to fill a need and to build relevant skills and accelerate the development of implementable real-world projects. They also speak to the gap in training public, civic and social innovators, whose needs are not well met by other learning programs or educational institutions.

Building On Lessons Learned

WHAT'S NEXT

In the face of:

- ▶ Growing, and unmet, demand;
- ▶ Distributed supply of expertise;
- ▶ New methods to solve public problems;
- ▶ Need to cross the chasm from idea to implementation;
- ▶ Peer to peer global learning and mentoring;
- ▶ Focus on better defining the problem;
- ▶ More data driven and evidence based solutions; and
- ▶ Coaching in collaboration with partner organizations.

Our next step is to replicate and scale what works:

- ▶ **Expanding** the coaching model to a wider audience of government, social and civic entrepreneurs to create more effective change agents.
- ▶ **Scaling up** our coaching programs for the winners of city-level prize backed channels to ensure that winning ideas are implementable.

Based on the high demand of applications we received for the coaching programs in addition to the requests from governments, international organizations and not-for-profit organizations to partner and offer a mix of workshops, courses and challenges paired with coaching, we believe that we need to *scale up* our offerings.

We are also working to establish a fixed core of regular faculty, generate more data to have conclusive metrics about the program's success, and create some additional tools to serve the needs of our learners. We also want to start experimenting with charging at different price points and staff up adequately to begin the sales cycle of selling coaching programs to institutions.

Additionally, we want to continue to explore new models to deliver training to the next generation of public problem solvers:

- ▶ Deepening communities of tech-enabled problem solvers in key domains, including criminal justice, humanitarian innovation, science for good, disaster management, and procurement and the business of government.

- ▶ Catalyzing more teaching and training of public interest technology and entrepreneurship by sharing curricula and building a community of faculty practitioners.

It is worth noting that although GovLab is based at a major research university, we choose not to offer for-credit degree programs. Although the revenues of such programs, if successful, can be attractive and predictable, they immediately limit our ability to draw upon the most innovative faculty *across* institutions. A Harvard faculty member will not teach in an NYU program. A practitioner might not be allowed to teach at all. With the coaching model, we cross institutional boundaries and we can make coaching programs available to universities as a value-add for their degree programs. However, to complement our online learning programs and in order to catalyze more public interest technology teaching at professional schools, we will continue to offer for-credit courses and explore the offering of degree granting program and progression of courses leading to a qualification in public technology and therefore inspire imitators in other schools and disciplines.

We will continue to help our community to measure impact and to iterate on their projects by leveraging our network of alumni on the Network of Innovators to work together to solve hard public problems.

These days, aspiring governance innovators at all levels have ample reading materials as well as a wide range of course offerings, both on- and off-line, available to them. What they do not have is ready access to short, intensive bursts of practitioner-focused support that are rooted in and organized around the actual projects on which they are working; energized by — but not over-burdened with — a “lightweight” support platform; disproportionately attentive to upstream problem definition and effective communications and enhanced with tested and easy-to-use tools and frameworks; and driven by the iterative learning engine of practice, feedback, coaching, and practice again.

How We Learned What We Know

We arrived at our current design after much experimentation. In the first year, we focused on building a library of high-quality video content to use in offering MOOC-style learning. Then we built a network of collaborating universities and faculty to pioneer the development of semester-long courses and capstones and to offer those courses online and real-time. In a first of its kind experiment, we blended face-to-face teaching with online learning in real time. In the third year, and in conversation with our community, we evolved the offerings to focus on the current coaching model, where faculty from around the world support teams working on common projects. Although all of them have been worthwhile, we believe the coaching model is both highly effective and scalable. And even though it doesn't reach the numbers that a passive MOOC does, 90% of the participants who start also finish. More important, *the experience translates into measurable downstream impact in communities.*

We nicknamed our coaching model the “Y Combinator for Civic Innovators” although our goal is to train and empower more people and not to exclude innovators from access to the tools, networks and resources that enable success. The GovLab Academy helps to equip more public-minded individuals with the skills to take a project from idea to implementation. This approach can be analogized to the relatively unknown [OpEd Project](#), whose goal is to increase the range of voices and quality of ideas we hear in the world, especially of women, by training people in the art of the op-ed and public commentary.

Academy participants single out the ready access to expert and, especially, peer mentors — e.g. “people I would not have met otherwise and whose ideas and expertise I plan to tap” — to be of great value. As well, participants appreciate the opportunity to collaborate with interdisciplinary teams and to have “our assumptions challenged” by those who share the same passion to make meaningful difference. Many have told us that the rigor of our approach — iterative practice and feedback at key stages of project development — is tough and frustrating, but immensely useful. It is painful, but valuable, to learn first-hand why “jumping to solutions too quickly is not going to allow for deep impact” and why knowing “who you want to solve for” is incomplete without understanding their experience or how they see things.

We have also heard that participants disproportionately gain insight from the attention paid both to upstream problem definition — the repeated injunction “to think big but start small” — and to the discipline of effective implementation, especially in the form of effective communication and design for impact. While participants have benefitted from general exposure to subject matter and technological expertise, the dominant note in their evaluative comments has been about the acceleration of learning and effectiveness that comes from an extremely tight focus, attention to communication and impact, and agile loops of interaction with mentors and peers.

Our belief has been strengthened by what we learned from a series of recent interviews with state and city CIOs and CTOs about skills gaps. Reflecting on the ability of their colleagues, old and new, to deal effectively with the ever-more data intensive nature of both policy making and policy implementation, they note with approval the greater attention increasingly being paid to analytics by colleges and universities. However, they point out that while new hires may have been trained in sound analytic techniques, they have not been rigorously trained to apply this knowledge to address messy real-world situations. As a result, their data/analytics skills usually are relegated to what are essentially routine “transaction processing” activities. Much of the potential for innovation gets lost.

For the government CIOs and CTOs with whom we spoke, this is symptomatic of a more general problem: the lack of robust, high-quality judgment about when, where, and to which kinds of questions to apply to which sets of analytic skills. In their view, this deficiency is most pronounced in poor problem framing and poor linkage of analytical work to the creation of usable intelligence – that is, in ways that reflect a lack of experience and comfort with, as well as sophistication in rigorous critical thinking. Compounding this deficit are parallel skill-related deficiencies in effective communication, “service process” mapping and analysis, and the design of metrics of impact and value, not just of input and activity. On-the-job experience, unfortunately, does little to improve things – given the silo-like structures and deeply risk-averse cultures in which much governance activity unfolds.

All these observations, together with our own pedagogical experience, help explain why, in shaping Academy offerings, we have consistently experimented with a set of design principles that differentiate what we do from other offerings in this space. Our objective has not been to be different for the sake of being different. It has been to focus sharply on delivering learning experiences and support that make for successful governance innovation projects. What we have learned or confirmed along the way provides the logic for the sustainable operating model that we now wish to scale.

How Learning Has Informed Design

OUR KEYS TO SUCCESS

What we have learned from observation, analytics and exit interviews has informed the design of the Academy offerings in the following way.

- ▶ **Personal Project Focus.** The Academy focuses on projects chosen by participants and reflective of issues to which they are passionately committed. This approach is in contrast to the plethora of course offerings on public sector management available through the curricula of reputable schools of government, public administration, and management where even project-based “capstone” courses tend to skew their pedagogy toward theory and where actual “capstone” projects on which students work are assigned and arranged by faculty. They are not initiatives that students frame or choose out of their own passion and judgment of social need.
- ▶ **Quick Iteration.** We have learned to shorten Academy offerings as a way of pushing teams to design, try things in the real world, reevaluate, reconfigure, and quickly try again – that is, to adopt a “lightweight” learning-driven innovation strategy driven by the logic of do/try/fail/learn/re-do.
- ▶ **Community.** While the Academy cannot accommodate as many participants in each course as a MOOC, 90% of the Academy participants complete the programs (as opposed to just 2-10% of MOOC participants). Furthermore, after projects are accepted, participants usually ask more team members to join the online sessions. We attribute this (based on what they have told us) to the active learning, hands on collaboration, and, above all, to the strong sense of community created by real-time, peer-to-peer learning. We also make a point of having teams mentor one another and maintain active discussion boards for each class. Finally, former students often become mentors to new students. All of this investment in active community-based learning keeps people engaged.
- ▶ **Rigorous Problem Definition.** An unintended by-product of the shift in focus to user-focused design of solutions is the failure to first define the problem. By contrast, Academy offerings all begin with intensive work, often using special Academy tools and templates, on problem definition, which sharpens the project focus and increases the chances that the solution will fit the problem.
- ▶ **Focus On Communications.** Academy projects all involve a regular cycle of team communications aimed at identifying and learning to persuade relevant constituencies, influencers, and decision-makers. We help teams develop competence in shaping and delivering their communications – oral, written, online, and presentation-ready – for and to specific audiences in specific contexts.

- ▶ **Practice.** Academy programs treat the peer/coach feedback loop as the single most essential mechanism for driving effective learning. Experience shows that virtually every area of professional work improves with practice, but governance innovators have few, if any, opportunities to practice and experiment. We offer a chance for apprenticeship – the chance to practice, over and over, in the line of sight of peers and coaches, who stand ready to provide feedback and experience-based mentoring.

Examples of Partnerships and Collaborations With Other Organizations

Through partnerships and collaborations we've been able to increase the impact of other people's initiatives and programs by means of our methodology for developing and launching effective civic innovation projects and products.

- ▶ **Open Seventeen Challenge** – In collaboration with [One](#), the [Citizen Cyberscience Centre](#), and the [Crowdcrafting](#) platform for open research, we launched The Open Seventeen challenge to develop citizen science crowdsourcing projects that tackle Sustainable Development Goals using open data. ONE and its partners selected three proposals and the GovLab Academy created a coaching program for the selected projects designed to help them develop their project from idea to implementation. Due to its success we are currently executing a second iteration of the challenge with now seven selected projects.
- ▶ **Crowdsourcing Disaster Response Innovations** – In partnership with the Secretary General for [Planning and Open Government of Quito](#), we are currently holding a dozen online sessions to bring the world's know-how, skills and experience to bear to help Quito prepare for the [likely eruption of the Cotopaxi Volcano](#) situated 30 miles from Quito.
- ▶ **Data-driven Criminal Justice Innovation** – In partnership with the [Laura and John Arnold Foundation](#), we are offering training programs beginning this autumn geared to practitioners working on data-driven criminal justice innovation. These programs will include skills-building courses and coaching aimed at helping innovators—especially teams within government—take public interest projects from idea to implementation.
- ▶ **The Future of Data at NHS** – Better use of data has the potential to improve the quality of healthcare for all, reduce costs, and promote innovation. Access to high quality, relevant data is essential, but to make use of that data, the NHS in England, in partnership with the Academy, will tackle the needs of their community through skills-building courses and project coaching to build the capacity for using data to improve people's lives. See [here](#) the preliminary report on the needs of the data-driven health community.

- ▶ **OAS Open Government Fellows Coaching Program** – In partnership with the Organization of American States, the GovLab Academy ran a coaching program in Spanish for the 24 Fellows selected for the first OAS Fellowship on Open Government in the Americas. In addition to direct coaching support, the program provides the Fellows, organized into six project teams, a space for peer-to-peer learning, feedback, and cross-team sharing. The 24 Fellows come from 16 countries in the Americas. Their teams work on open government projects in different areas: public infrastructure, public safety, investigative journalism, open justice, disability, arts and culture, and innovation labs. The coaching sessions cover such topics as problem definition, user analysis, effective use of mentors, solution prototyping, measuring impact, and communicating effectively. We will repeat the program in 2016.
- ▶ **USDA Open Data Summer Camp** – To support the US Department of Agriculture’s mission, the GovLab Academy designed and executed a dual pilot of a two-week open data summer program, in July 2015 (to be repeated in 2016), for Washington, DC-area teenagers. The camp’s goal was to help the leaders of tomorrow learn more about data, the tools of data science, and the ways they might be leveraged to improve innovation and security in the nation’s food supply. The camp also provided an opportunity for USDA employees to support the goal of strengthening STEM education in this country by piloting an initiative that can be scaled and replicated across agencies and across levels of government.
- ▶ **LabWorks 2015** – LabWorks 2015 brought together public innovators from across the world for a two-day global gathering in London. In addition to an online coaching program for those trying to design and launch Public Labs, following the event, Nesta, GovLab, and MindLab also hosted a face to face intensive coaching program for a select group on labs. Tightly focused on the discipline of identifying and framing in actionable ways one of their most pressing current problems, this hands-on experiment proved highly successful by making real progress in learning and practicing new skills, and in building the personal relationships needed to support an emergent community of practice. See [here](#) a summary on the impact of the workshop.
- ▶ **Network of Innovators: Content and Skills Partnerships**–The GovLab partnered with numerous organizations including NESTA, the World Bank and The Behavioral Insights Team (Nudge Unit) to develop content and tools for participants to learn about and measure their skills in a variety of different areas of governance innovation ranging from prize-backed challenges to citizen engagement to creating A/B tests. We also worked with content partners at NYU’s Center for Urban Science and Progress (CUSP) and Stern School of Business to develop original learning materials.

Additional Resources

Appendix A – Detailed list and description of the coaching programs offered

Appendix B – The GovLab Academy faculty

Appendix C – Project gallery and highlighted projects

Appendix D – Coaching program playbook

Appendix E – Syllabi from Government 3.0 and Solving Public Problems with Technology courses and the coaching programs

Appendix F – GovLab Academy participant feedback - Letters and Tweets

Appendix G – Online tools being used in the programs

Appendix H – The GovLab Public Problem Solving Canvas

Appendix I – Picture gallery

Appendix J – Crowdsourcing expertise on innovation in disaster management - the Cotopaxi Volcano case-study

Appendix K – Letter of Commitment for coaching program participants

Appendix L – Analysis of coaching programs feedback