

CIVIC # HALL

A Report on Our First Six Months:

February - July 2015

SIX-MONTH REPORT

Dear members and friends:

It's been a year to the day since we acquired the keys to Civic Hall, and just over half a year since we opened our doors to the public, so now seems a good moment to report on what we've accomplished thus far and where we're going. What follows is a snapshot of our community in motion. We're growing and evolving rapidly so please consider this report as an invitation to join in a continuing conversation. We look forward to your feedback!

Sincerely,

Micah, Andrew, Jessica, Heidi, and the rest of the Civic Hall team

WHAT IS CIVIC HALL?

Civic Hall is a vibrant year-round community center, collaborative work and event space in the heart of New York City's Silicon Alley, where diverse civic innovators work, network, learn and organize to solve civic problems—and at scale. Our growing community of technologists, social entrepreneurs, government officials, organizers, philanthropy professionals, journalists, researchers, and makers is dedicated to cutting-edge problem solving.

Since we opened in February, we've focused on welcoming you, the people who make up that community to the space, signing you up as individual and organizational members, catalyzing connections, convening timely gatherings and events on a range of civic tech topics; nurturing early-stage civic start-ups; generating new resources for the community; and engaging political leaders and policymakers.

Civic Hall is conceived around a few key assumptions about the civic tech community. We developed them from an extensive pre-launch research effort involving one-on-one conversations with 150 stakeholders and several in-depth group design charrettes. These are:

- Civic tech is at a moment of definition and growth, when a diverse set of actors is uniting around the idea of advancing the use of tech for the public good.
- These varied participants need a place to congregate, a daily home base in the heart of New York City, whether they are based here or based elsewhere.
- The civic tech field needs a “third place” that is functionally more engaging than hackathons and less structured than an incubator.

When these elements are combined, with knowledgeable leadership, more civic start-ups and larger scale partnerships will develop and solve civic problems, known and so far unrecognized.

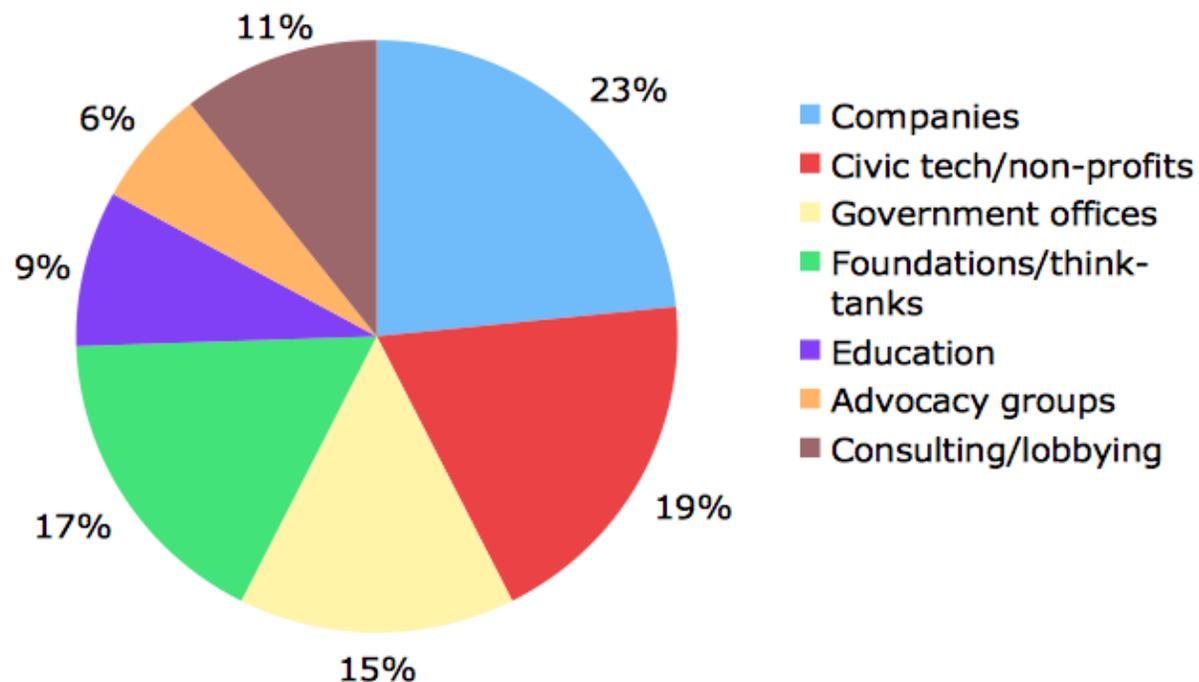
Here is our six-month evaluation of these assumptions.

A SPECTRUM OF MEMBERS

ORGANIZATIONS

Are diverse actors finding common interest uniting around civic tech? Judging from who is joining Civic Hall and using it for convenings, the answer is yes. Organizations from government, industry, philanthropy, civic engagement and advocacy have joined and use Civic Hall for staff meetings, convenings, and public events. A full list of formal organizational members follows at the end of this report; here's how they break down by sector (as of the end of July).

Civic Hall organizational members



In addition to the entities who have joined Civic Hall formally, a number of mid-sized and large organizations have also chosen Civic Hall as the site for their major events. They include NASA, the New York City Mayor's Office, Cornell Technion, the Municipal Arts Society, Quartz, the NY Tech Meetup, and Code for America.

A SPECTRUM OF MEMBERS

INDIVIDUALS

Is there a critical mass of people who need a home base for their civic tech work and does Civic Hall provide it? Again, indications show a strong demand for this kind of place and from several categories of members. As you know, full time members get 24/7 access to the common space plus ten hours of conference room time. Community members can drop in anytime during open hours to use the common space and pay per hour for conference rooms. Network members get free access to Civic Hall's member events, internal emails (and the member portal that is coming soon!) and can buy day passes and conference room time at will. All levels of membership get discounted rates for conference rooms plus other amenities.

As of the end of July, we had 504 members, 228 as individuals and the remainder through 46 member organizations. The membership is 58 percent male and 42 percent female—which accounts for what we've heard repeatedly: Civic Hall doesn't feel like a typical male-dominated tech space. Although we don't have a perfect way to track ethnic diversity we believe that about 15 percent our membership is from communities of color and we are working to increase that.

Here's what some community members have to say about using Civic Hall on a daily basis:

Erin Mazursky, the founder and executive director of Rhize, which consults with and supports social change groups around the world, says:

CH has been a game-changer for us! At the beginning of this year, I was just working out of coffeeshops with an intern, until I realized CH had finally opened. The space gives me a place to come everyday, which has made me a lot more sane. It's given us the opportunity to bring in partners/thought leaders and have them feel like we're not just Rhize but a part of a bigger community in New York. On top of that, it's helped my team coordinate better and have better communication, and overall our productivity is through the roof in comparison to the beginning of this year! It's also just been so so helpful to have other people around as thought partners. I was able to pick Jeanne Brooks' brain about decentralized networks for a report I was writing. Ben Knight's brownbag lunch led me to a better understanding of how to go about developing Rhize as a cooperative, and he introduced me to others. The Civic Women happy hour has led to a lot of new contacts

A SPECTRUM OF MEMBERS

and collaborations. Out of that, I was able to attend a social lab with a few other CH members, hosted by Kanwal Karim, and made some great connections there...overall CH has been invaluable to our work—not just in terms of our day to day but how we're able to connect and be better off than if we were just

And Daniel Latorre, a product manager working in civic tech, engagement, and urbanism, who runs The Wise City, says:

The Comptroller project that [Civic Hall government relations consultant] Samara Daly convened a meeting on led to me (The Wise City) and Bureau Blank [another Civic Hall member] collaborating on a proposal that we're sending over to the Comptroller this week/any day now. The clients came in thinking they needed a smartphone app but our initial meeting convinced them that it's probably not the case but other civic tech options should be pursued in a Lean manner to ensure we can make impact in getting unrecovered funds to workers. It's the sort of socially complex nerdy project I enjoy and it seems Bureau Blank will make nice partners. Generally the space has been

socially supportive given the birds of a feather density ratio each week, especially with folks who live elsewhere but come swing by when here. As one example it's been great to see Emily Jacobi [of Digital Democracy] each time she's been in town, in past times we had to coordinate a place and time to meet which was tricky, but now Civic Hall, the place, makes all that moot since it's a watering hole people now congregate around. This is the power of a good co-working space which is a mix of social workspace and "third space" in urban sociology terms. And from this increased birds of a feather time I'm now in a writing group with Emily and a couple other folks in DC. This serendipitous realization was definitely born directly from Civic Hall chats. These three are the best top of mind things to share for now, there are smaller moments in social/profession support like Sean McDonald and I being able to chat easily when he's in town, and other folks I've wanted to chat more with but haven't in part due to the practical logistics of scheduling in NYC without a stable common ground that's mutually beneficial on many levels.

A SPECTRUM OF MEMBERS

Feedback like this makes us very happy. A survey we recently completed, which received responses from 74 members at all levels, found that all but one said they would recommend Civic Hall to a friend or colleague. A third said they had already achieved their purpose in joining and nearly half said they were on the way there.

“Civic Hall is my second home,” Minerva Tantoco, New York City’s CTO, recently exclaimed during an event on innovative approaches to procurement. Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer, who has a long history as a tech innovator, has often said something similar, most recently at the workshop we co-hosted with her office on the day of NYC’s Open Data Law’s annual update. Diane Levitt, the director of partnerships for Cornell Technion told a group of computer science educators assembled at her event that “Civic Hall is an extraordinary example of new civic thinking in the 21st Century.”



INTEREST IN CIVIC TECH IS RISING

Since February, we have doubled the subscriber base of First Post, our daily email newsletter on the civic tech ecosystem, from 450 to 950, with open rates regularly surpassing 30 percent. A Civicist article by Mark Headd, on fixing procurement, led Civic Hall member Sam Kaspick of T4A.org, to feature it as the theme of his organization's weekly email, to 3,500 readers. And our new book on tech for civic engagement, *A Lever and a Place to Stand: How Civic Tech Can Move the World*, is reaching influential audiences, including in City Hall. But halfway through our first year, we know there is still much more we can do with you, our members and friends, to strengthen our common interest in civic tech's growth.

According to Mediacloud, the number of specific references to the terms "civic tech" or "civic technology" in all media (news and blogs) rose from 434 during the last six months of 2014 to 816 in the first six months of 2015. Many practitioners want to engage on this this subject, as reflected in the launch of Civicist, our news site for reporting on civic tech, and contributions we have received from thought leaders like Mark Headd of Accela, Matt Stempeck of Microsoft Civic, Laurenellen McCann and Hollie Russon Gilman of New America, Sean McDonald of Frontline SMS, Anthony Townsend of

NYU, An Xioa Mina of Meedan, and Dave Karpf of George Washington University.

We're eager for all our members to join in, whether on this or other important joint themes. This summer, we've been developing a more robust team to work with individual members and ensure that you are being engaged and supported.



EARLY SUCCESSES

Is Civic Hall enabling early-stage civic startups and collaborative working groups to thrive? Here our findings are by necessity more anecdotal. There are a number of civically oriented start-ups and organizations at Civic Hall, including:

- BetaNYC
- CityMart
- Economic Hardship Reporting Project
- Engine.is
- Explore NYC Parks
- FutureAir
- HeatSeek
- Hiccup.co
- ISOC-NY
- Rhinobird
- Rhize
- ShiftSpark
- This.cm
- Vizalytics (MindMyBusiness)
- VoteRunLead
- Wikiburg

Members who aren't based here daily but joined Civic Hall to use it when they are in New York also describe concrete benefits for their work. For example, our co-founder Micah Sifry introduced journalist and educator Dan Gillmor to peripatetic Baratunde Thurston, the new executive producer of The Daily Show, (both are Civic Hall members) for an interview about his online course on digital literacy.

We know of at least five examples of people getting jobs and contracts as a result of connections at Civic Hall—and many examples of partnerships. Alex Torpey, the outgoing mayor of South Orange, NJ, connected serendipitously with Erin Vilaridi, the founder of VoteRunLead, and they partnered on a VRL leadership training event at Civic Hall. Jeanne Brooks, formerly of Hacks/Hackers, was hired by fellow Civic Hall member DataKind, to be its director of global communities. Dorian Benkoil, a self-employed digital strategist and member, put together a self-employed accountability group, to help individuals who are often working on projects alone or remotely.

Engendering large-scale partnerships is in many ways the most valuable and hardest work we do, with the longest gestation time. All kinds of

EARLY SUCCESSES

promising seeds are being planted and nurtured.

For example, the Speaker of the New York City Council recently announced Council 2.0, a roadmap for introducing civic tech initiatives that will help bring government into the 21st century. Civic Hall will be partnering with the City Council on this groundbreaking initiative.

The New York City Comptroller's Office came to us with a challenge: distributing a \$3.6 million settlement of unclaimed wages to majority black and Latino workers, won back from city contractors who did not pay their employees. We put together a working group of Civic Hall members ranging from data scientists to social ethnographers to meet with the Comptroller's Office. Ultimately, an SMS-based solution was developed and pitched by members Bureau Blank, a design and development agency, and The Wise City's Daniel Latorre.

NYC's 311 office launched a series of office hour events at which it presented three different design challenges to Civic Hall members. Members responded with gratis workshops, brainstorming sessions, and data analysis. "When 311's services end, how can it help give access to services to follow up on needs?" One member of Civic Hall,



EARLY SUCCESSES

Marianne Bellotti, who runs a small open data SAAS service company, Exversion, is now helping NYC 311 with data management issues.

The Manhattan Borough President's Office held an event here to train community board members and Civic Hall members how to analyze and visualize open data in order to make better decisions in their districts with the help of the GovLab, beta.NYC, and more. City Councilman Corey Johnson hosted his West Side Summit here, which included his "State of the District" address and announcements of the winners of his local participatory budgeting project.

Democracy 2.1, an organizing experimenting globally in collective decision-making processes, worked with city councilors they met through Civic Hall to launch pilot projects in participatory budgeting in New York City, and used Civic Hall as a base to acquire, train, and deploy volunteers.

Another type of collaboration we are seeing is further upstream, at the level of social engagement around a common interest. We convened an event discussing Trebor Scholz's pathbreaking article in Medium on "Platform cooperatives vs. the sharing economy." That led us to launch a working group that has met several times for informal conversation



EARLY SUCCESSES

Involving the Freelancers Union, Fair Care Labs, Blue Ridge Labs, the Robin Hood Foundation, and others. Scholz and another Civic Hall member, Nathan Schneider, are organizing a two-day conference, co-sponsored by Civic Hall, this fall at The New School.

Similarly, our chief community officer and founding COO Heidi Sieck has created and fostered an ongoing meetup around #CivicWomen, building a social network that meets monthly at Civic Hall, hosting demos by female social entrepreneurs working in the civic tech arena. We're now working on expanding the meetups to book talks and a film series. #CivicWomen meetups have already spread to London and San Francisco.

Further, naming a Chief Community Officer and adding our new Director of Community Jennifer Shaw, we are focusing our effort to expand and diversify the membership and provide robust support for more engagement in our community space.

As we dive into our next six months, we are excited to report that our growing ability to carry out more intensive programmatic work. We've welcomed three new staff—Bryan Sivak, senior fellow and entrepreneur in residence; Andrew

Slack, civic imagination fellow; and Erin Simpson, project director—to work on strategic partnerships, research, and civic engagement campaigns. We're in the process of launching a timely project on “rethinking debates” that will add to our ongoing efforts to use technology to enhance democracy. And we are deep in conversations with an array of local and national civic institutions and foundations about several big initiatives that, we believe, can demonstrate the power of civic tech to solve important public problems at scale. In the coming months, we will have more to report on these fronts.

Meanwhile, we are eager to hear back from you about your experience, insight, and insight. We hope you agree that we are where we should be after six months, with our levers planted right where they can help most move the world in a better direction.



APPENDIX

Civic Hall organizational members as of July 28, 2015 (* denotes founding partner/sponsor)

COMPANIES

- Airbnb
- Blue State Digital
- Change.org
- General Assembly
- Google*
- IBM
- Microsoft*
- NationBuilder
- NuCivic
- Techonomy
- Yelp

NON-PROFIT/ CIVIC TECH

- BetaNYC
- Code for America
- DataKind
- Democracy 2.1
- Digital Democracy
- DoSomething.org
- ICANN
- NY Tech Meetup*
- Omega Institute

EDUCATION

- New York City Foundation for Computer Science Education
- NYU Center for Urban Science and Progress
- Parsons eLab
- The New School Civic Innovation Group

ADVOCACY GROUPS

- Consumer Reports
- FWD.us
- Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America

GOVERNMENT

- Manhattan Borough President's Office
- New York City 311
- New York Attorney General's Office
- New York City Economic Development Corporation
- New York City Council Speaker's Office

- New York City Mayor's Office of Technology + Innovation
- New York City Comptroller's Office

FOUNDATIONS/ THINK TANKS

- CraigConnects
- Demos
- Harnisch Foundation
- Independent Diplomat
- New America*
- Omidyar Network*
- Rita Allen Foundation
- Robin Hood Foundation

CONSULTING/ LOBBYING

- Baker Hostetler
- CGI Group, Inc.
- Curmudgeon Group
- Gerson Lehrman Group
- Public Works Partners