



CivicLab is a nonprofit social venture to create a place and a space for activists and hacktivists to come together to collaborate, investigate, educate and construct tools that will facilitate civic engagement.

We want to bring practitioners of old school and new school social change activism together in a store front setting in order to build tools for:

(1) **Distributed Democracy**

Spreading out the means and methods of democratic practice to the average citizen using technology.

Examples

- Citizens monitor infrastructure
- Online spaces for issue education and analysis
- Online town forums
- Online voting
- Participatory budget analysis
- Participatory budget allocation

(2) **Government Accountability**

Using technology to x-ray and expose all activities of government and influences on government in order to reveal any potential or real conflicts-of-interest.

Examples

- Online databases (contributions, contracts, etc.)
- Government data flow (employees, expenditures, statistics)
- Visualization of processes and relationships
- Coverage of all aspects of government operations – especially those involving tax expenditures & special deals

(3) **Civic Engagement**

Encouraging citizens to take an active and ongoing role in shaping and guiding their local communities

Examples

- Volunteering
- Donating to change and improvement efforts
- Voting and assisting the election process
- Participating in community improvement efforts
- Participating in civic investigations and research
- Working for political campaigns
- Running for local office

The kinds of activities that we envision taking place in the CivicLab are:

- Workshops on civic journalism, activism techniques, coding, watchdog basics
- Lectures and presentations by scholars, activists and practitioners on trends in civic engagement
- Meetings and networking activities that mix activists from across the city and across interests
- A lab environment with tools, gear and work space to make objects useful for civic engagement
- Project-based work on specific issues that involve access to data and civic education
- Original research on civic engagement trends and needs

- Production of training materials such as videos, podcasts and guide books
- Publication of products that document and explain our work
- Classes taught in conjunction with civics program of local university
- Library of printed and digital references for civic engagement
- Exhibits of work related to civic engagement

The CivicLab would have a robust web site that would house data tools, reports and other content related to our work. It would also be an online community that mirrors and expands upon the community we build in the store front space. This online space would be open to activists from any location. We see classes and other training activities that happen in physical space being archived online. We also online exclusive educational materials around civic engagement being produced and parked on this web site.

Some examples of programs that have some of these features:

Civic Center – New Orleans – www.civiccenter.cc

“Civic Center is a creative studio based in New Orleans that works to make cities more comfortable for people. Founded by Candy Chang and James A. Reeves in 2010, Civic Center blends art, design, education, research, and urban planning to create spaces and tools that help people navigate their cities and improve their neighborhoods. We believe that public spaces should inspire conversation, make the machinery of the city more accessible, and restore a sense of dignity to the public realm.”

Sunlight Labs – Washington, D.C. – www.sunlightlabs.com

“Sunlight Labs is part of the Sunlight Foundation a non-profit, non partisan Washington, DC based organization focused on digitization of government data and making tools and websites to make it easily accessible. Sunlight Labs is an open source community of thousands dedicated to using technology to transform government. We focus on transparency- the idea that government can be more effective, more honest, and more accountable when it makes data about its process, operations, and influences available to the public. Our work revolves around opening up government data of all forms. Paid staff of Sunlight Labs are employees of the Sunlight Foundation a 501c(3) non-partisan non-profit organization. The Sunlight Foundation is: (1) A think-tank that develops and encourages new policies inside the government to be more transparent and accountable, (2) A campaign to engage citizens to change government's transparency policies, (3) An investigative organization that uses the data and applications to demonstrate why we need those policies, (4) A grant giving institution that gives grants to organizations using technology to further our mission and create community, (5) An open source technology community that revolves around the Sunlight Foundation's core mission.”

Code For America – San Francisco - <http://codeforamerica.org>

“Code for America helps governments work better for everyone with the people and the power of the web. Through our [Fellowship](#), [Accelerator](#), and [Brigade](#), we're building a network of cities, citizens, community groups, and startups, all equally committed to reimagining government for the 21st century. Code for America isn't just a way to offer city governments technical talent at less than market rates. Beyond just the projects our fellows build, the program is designed to: (1) **Cultivate the next generation of public sector technology leaders.** Up to 60% of the municipal workforce in many cities will retire in the next five years. This represents not only a crisis of talent, but also a huge opportunity. Think how much can change if we fill those positions with people who have a native understanding of how technology can work in modern urban life. (2) **Inject a culture virus into city government.** We recruit fellows who demonstrate a networked, web-centric and open approach to problem-solving. Attaching the fellows to the city for the year and helping them build relationships with a wide variety of city workers is an effective way to introduce this kind of thinking and help it spread. (3) **Encourage experimentation.** The fellows will be 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. (4) **Change the tool set.** Part of the job of the fellows will be to help introduce lightweight, simple technology that can help with internal functions. These small changes can have large lasting effects. (5) **Facilitate collaboration with other cities.** 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

CitizenLab – Toronto – www.citizenlab.org

“The Citizen Lab is an interdisciplinary laboratory based at the Munk School of Global Affairs at the University of Toronto, Canada focusing on advanced research and development at the intersection of digital media, global security, and human rights. We are a “hothouse” that combines the disciplines of political science, sociology,

computer science, engineering, and graphic design. Our mission is to undertake advanced research and engage in development that monitors, analyses, and impacts the exercise of political power in cyberspace. We undertake this mission through collaborative partnerships with leading edge research centers, organizations, and individuals around the world, and through a pioneering “fusion” methodology that combines technical reconnaissance, field investigations, and data mining, analysis, and visualization.”

Involve – London - <http://www.involve.org.uk>

“Involve are experts in public participation. We believe passionately in a democracy where citizens are able to take and influence the decisions that affect their lives. Through both research and practice we seek to radically transform the relationship between citizens and their governments to better use the creativity, energy, knowledge, skills and resources of all. We are currently facing complex challenges which require citizens and governments to work together to build a shared vision of a sustainable future. Experience and research has shown that when done well, public participation can help to: (1) Identify solutions to complex problems, (2) Improve the efficiency and effectiveness of public spending and services, (3) Promote social cohesion and social justice, and overcome conflict, (4) Build the confidence and agency of individuals and communities, (5) Improve well-being and reduce social problems.”

Founder: Tom Tresser, Chief Tool Builder

- Organizing in Chicago since 1990
- Organizer of No Games Chicago in 2009
- Green Party candidate for Cook County Board President in 2010
- Teaching classes on civic engagement at local universities for six years.
- Done leadership training sessions in seven states.
- Long-time advocate and practitioner of ***distributed democracy*** and citizen journalism.



“A popular government without popular information or the means of acquiring it, is but a prologue to a farce, or a tragedy, or perhaps both.” ~ James Madison

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Chicago