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## Community and Economic Development in North Carolina and Beyond Blog: Economic Development via “White Hat” Hacking? 2015 Statewide Conference – CityCamp NC

By CED Guest Author

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The 2015 edition of CityCamp NC was held in Raleigh, June 11-13. It is the sixth year of bringing citizens, local and state government, and businesses together to improve the quality of life through information technology (IT) and the use of open, public data. Local elected officials from Cary, Raleigh and Wake County spoke, as well as IT start-up and established businesses, interested citizens and more. Some of the topics touched on community and economic development.

An open and innovative spirit prevailed through conference sessions. People “pitched ideas” and projects, folks reported on efforts in progress and brainstorming sessions were part of the 2.5-day program.

One of the five “hackathon” projects on June 13 [i.e., concentrated computer coding to develop an application, usually done by a group coordinating their efforts] was Affordable Housing Resources in Raleigh. Volunteer groups of civic hackers came from Asheville, Cary, Charlotte, Greensboro, Durham, Raleigh and other localities. These white-hat hackers want to have more open local and state government data so they can help fellow citizens learn about and influence government policies and programs.

The volunteer groups are termed “brigades” as part of the national nonprofit Code for America . Economic Development is one of the four focus areas for 2015. Code for America focuses on economic development at the small and medium-scale, using IT and data mash-ups for new ideas and agile technology development in civic IT start-ups, or by government agencies partnering with businesses of all sizes.

CityCamp NC’s openness and speed for working from an idea to a mobile phone application is infectious. For this CityCamp, it was embodied in 10-year old Gavin Clark, who came up with an idea at the heart of many small town community development strategies and focuses on the state’s cultural assets. Gavin is interested in NC history and loves the NC historical landmarks, when he can read them from the back seat of his parents’ car. **New Cartographers** was the title of Gavin’s pitch: making it easy to read NC historic landmarks through a geo-located web service.



Gavin created an app to locate and display historic landmarks and create walking paths to connect them. On the last day of CityCamp, Gavin won the first place, \$2,000 prize for best use of ESRI technology.

Imagination and tapping volunteer talent and the many opportunities of our wired world are key parts of economic development. Small communities may struggle on some fronts, but having a few committed and skilled people on information technology, and combining ideas from economic development experts and “average citizens” may lead to low cost, big return ideas for building on current assets or finding a new niche in the NC or world economy. To spur some ideas, here is the list of early projects and project ideas from across NC.

A brigade in your area can be a useful resource as you think about converting open data into small business opportunities, or want to tap civic-oriented IT expertise.

- Asheville <http://www.codeforasheville.org/>
- Cary – <http://www.meetup.com/Triangle-Code-for-America/events/223480994/>
- Charlotte – <http://www.codeforcharlotte.org/>
- Durham <http://codefordurham.com/>
- Greensboro <http://codeforgreensboro.org/>
- Raleigh – <http://www.meetup.com/Triangle-Code-for-America/> and <http://www.codeforraleigh.com/>

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