

Public Interest Technology University Network Challenge – Year 3

Request for Proposals

Background

In the 1960s and 1970s, landmark investments from the philanthropic community elevated the legal profession from a road to wealth and power to a transformational force in serving the public good. With the support of the Ford Foundation and others, institutions of higher learning built paths that allowed the brightest minds of the era to find their footing in public service. That leadership allowed the discipline of public-interest law to flourish as not only a prestigious area of study, but a formal field of practice.

Similarly, institutions of higher learning are now coming together to integrate the fields of technology, public policy, business, law, ethics, governance, and social justice into the field of Public Interest Technology. Public Interest Technology refers to the study and application of technology expertise to advance the public interest in a way that generates public benefits and promotes the public good, particularly for those members of our society least well served historically and today by existing systems and policies. Importantly, it includes both individuals who approach these questions from a technological background, those with lived experience and expertise, *and* those coming from other disciplines (including, but not limited to, law and social science and movement-building) who seek to understand, use, and respond to the changes brought by new technologies. It can—and should—also include people who may not identify as technologists but are at the forefront of equalizing access to technology and promoting inclusive tech policy, such as those working in the ecosystems of access, open source and creative commons, digital literacy, inclusive design, movement and activist tech, community tech, and digital privacy and security. By offering a systematic way of studying technology as a tool for addressing social problems in the world—including unforeseen and adverse consequences of technology (in particular with respect to historically underserved and underrepresented racial and marginalized groups) and ways to harmonize technology and society—educational institutions can train a new generation of graduates who have both technological literacy and a rigorous foundation to navigate the societal, ethical, legal, policy, and equity implications of the new age.

Public Interest Technology University Network

The Public Interest Technology University Network (PIT-UN) is a partnership of colleges and universities committed to educating students who can better apply technical understanding and practice to questions of individual rights, justice, social welfare, and the public good, particularly for those members of our society least well served historically and today by existing systems and policies.

As it nurtures the pipeline of emerging technologists prepared to approach these questions, PIT-UN envisions a future where technology policy actively challenges structural inequalities in power, resources, and access by centering the needs of people and communities, particularly for those historically marginalized. In practice, this means that the traditional gatekeepers of technological advancement and public policy interrogate how they can better identify and work with communities in the development of Public Interest Technology as an ecosystem and elevate these communities as co-creators and leaders.

The goals of the network are to:

- Connect accredited nonprofit institutions of higher education in the US that seek to take the lead in establishing and defining the field of Public Interest Technology within academia;
- Spur the development of a strong pipeline of students seeking to pursue careers in Public Interest Technology, broadly defined; taking active measures to ensure that this pipeline is diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, ability, gender, and socioeconomic status; and characterized by a sense of inclusion and belonging for students and practitioners;
- Foster collaborations and connections across the network and to practitioners in the wider ecosystem.

The Public Interest Technology University Network's challenge grants are funded through the support of the Ford Foundation, Hewlett Foundation, Mastercard Impact Fund with support from Mastercard Center for Inclusive Growth, Patrick J. McGovern Foundation, The Raikes Foundation, Schmidt Futures and The Siegel Family Endowment.

The Fund is a project of the New Venture Fund (NVF), a 501(c)(3) public charity that supports innovative and effective public-interest projects.

The PIT University Network Challenge

The PIT University Network Challenge seeks to encourage new ideas, foster collaborations, and incentivize resource- and information-sharing among network members. In 2020—PIT-UN's second year—42 proposals from 28 institutions were awarded a total of \$4,404,595 in grant funds.

For its third year, projects addressing any of the priority areas below are welcome.

- i. Educational Offerings
- ii. Career Pipeline/Placement
- iii. Faculty & Institution Building
- iv. Strengthening the PIT University Network

Projects may include such ideas as:

- Experiential learning opportunities, such as clinics, fellowships, apprenticeships, or internships that give students real-world exposure to the practice of Public Interest Technology.
- New models of career training, placement, and/or financial support for individuals who seek to pursue careers in the nascent field of Public Interest Technology.
- Partnerships with nonprofit, private sector, or affinity group partners that demonstrate the real-world application of Public Interest Technology to center community voice in pursuit of solutions for pressing problems, particularly challenges experienced by marginalized communities least well served by existing systems and policies.
- New models to aid pre- and post-tenured faculty participation in (and recognition for) the research, curriculum development, teaching, and service work that builds Public Interest Technology as an arena of inquiry and training.
- Platforms or practices to connect educators focused on Public Interest Technology so they may share curricula and strategies for improving Public Interest Technology programs.
- Projects that aim to identify and pursue the central issues and questions that animate Public Interest Technology as a field of study.

The PIT-UN Challenge will prioritize projects that center the needs of communities who have historically been denied access to new technologies, been systematically left out of conversations at the intersection of technology and policy, and who have been denied opportunities to join the technology workforce, in efforts to further the positive social impact of technology for all communities. Centering community needs may be demonstrated by incorporating community partners in the design and execution of proposed projects.

Proposals are invited in three funding tranches. Budgets should be inclusive of an indirect rate, set at 20% of total direct costs.

- i. Up to \$45,000 for direct and indirect costs
- ii. Up to \$90,000 for direct and indirect costs
- iii. Up to \$180,000 for direct and indirect costs

1. Eligibility

In Year 3 (2021), the Challenge Fund will accept the following types of proposals in response to its RFP:

- i. Proposals from new or charter network members who are proposing a new project for 2021
- ii. Proposals from awarded Year 1 or 2 applicants who wish to continue and/or scale their projects

There is a limit to the number of proposals a university can submit:

- New network members can submit a total of three proposals, only one of which can fall within the funding tranche \$91,000-\$180,000.
- Charter network members can submit the following:
 - a. Proposals for new projects, adding up to a total of three. One of these can fall within the funding tranche \$91,000-\$180,000.
 - b. Any number of proposals to expand/scale awarded Year 1 or 2 projects, beyond the three outlined in (a). Any number of these can fall in the funding tranche \$91,000 -\$180,000.

A person may be listed as the Principal Investigator (PI) on only one Challenge application, but individuals may be listed as collaborators on multiple applications.

Proposals that are a collaboration between two or more universities should submit one single application, explaining the nature of the collaboration in their application.

2. Evaluation Criteria

Application. Application meets all stated requirements for completion.	Eligible/Ineligible
Project Plan. Proposals for new projects: Project has clearly defined objectives; a well-designed method; a process and timeline to achieve goals; provides an evaluation plan with measurable indicators of success; project is feasible and likely to succeed. Proposals to expand/scale awarded Year 1 or 2 projects: Project has clearly defined objectives; a well-defined method; a process and timeline to achieve goals; an evaluation plan with measurable indicators of success; and clarity on how it builds upon both accomplishments and lessons learned to date.	Up to 10 points
Impact. Proposals for new projects: Application clearly articulates the rationale for the project and connects it to important assumptions about the work, prioritized activities, and its intended impact over time; project appears likely to meaningfully advance the field of Public Interest Technology and furthers the goals stated in the RFP. Proposals to expand/scale awarded Year 1 or 2 projects: Application clearly articulates what the project has accomplished to date, and the rationale for	Up to 20 points

its completion, connecting both to assumptions about the work, prioritized activities, and its intended impact in a potential second or third year.	
<p>Network Impact.</p> <p>Proposals to expand/scale awarded Year 1 or 2 projects: Project pioneers an original, innovative or otherwise useful prototype that can be scaled to other schools; creates shared resources for members of the PIT University Network; or otherwise stands to benefit other schools in the PIT University Network.</p>	Up to 20 points
<p>Institutional Support.</p> <p>Requesting up to \$90,000: Project has demonstrated buy-in from the applicant’s university that will help sustain its impact—for example through contributed university funds, support from university leadership, or collaboration between departments, faculty, or other groups.</p> <p>Requesting \$91,000 to \$180,000: The project team has secured specific commitments from their university. Such commitments may be in the form of cash contributions (either the value of the effort that university-paid personnel are expending on the project or monies from a university gift, endowment, and/or other unrestricted fund) and/or in-kind support (real property, equipment, supplies and other expendable property, or goods and services).</p> <p>Proposals to expand/scale awarded Year 1 or 2 projects in any of the aforementioned amounts: The project team’s institutional plan(s) and related commitments clearly demonstrate institutionalization of Public Interest Technology within their university.</p>	<p>Up to 10 points</p> <p>(15 points for \$180,000 proposals)</p>

<p>Partnerships. Applicants have included as part of their proposals meaningful and equitable partnerships with one or more of the following entities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other educational institutions in their proposals, including those that are not part of the PIT-UN University Network, in particular Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs) as well as two-year, community college institutions of higher education • Other educational institutions, including those that are not part of the PIT-UN University Network, affinity groups, or organizations that focus on non-tech disciplines including, but not limited to, ethnic studies, disabilities studies, history, humanities, and social sciences • Community organizations that have a specific focus on workforce development and/or creating career pathways for populations currently underrepresented in public service or STEM; affinity groups or organizations that support academic leadership among communities of color <p>Meaningful and equitable partnerships may include, but are not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs), including for internships and practica • Co-publishing • Past collaboration on a previous funding opportunity • Hosting joint events 	Up to 20 points
<p>Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The project team clearly articulates major barriers to equity and access related to Public Interest Technology and identifies gaps in the workforce pipeline that leads to exclusion of the majority of non-white people, women, and people with disabilities in the current tech workforce • The project’s objectives and method includes a plan to address a subset of those problems, ensuring that aspects of racial, ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic diversity and equity are reflected in the design and reach of the project (i.e., students served) as well as the staffing of the proposed project team • The project team’s program has an existing record of serving ethnically, racially, socioeconomically diverse and underrepresented populations or an actionable plan to use this funding to engage and serve those populations that is informed by best practices 	Up to 20 points

3. Application

Asterisk () denotes required field*

A. GENERAL INFORMATION

Proposal Title:*

Proposal Summary:*

Amount Requested:*

Will any part of this grant funding be used to conduct lobbying as defined by federal tax law?*

Will this grant be used to support work that includes interacting or communicating with minors (individuals under age 18)?*

Minors defined as individuals under age 18. If you select 'Yes,' you are required to submit the NVF Child Safeguarding Policy Information Sheet found under Section D 'UPLOADS.'

Projected Start Date of Project:*

Projected End Date of Project:*

Please check the box that most closely matches the proposal you are submitting:*

Please check only one box

- ☐ I am a new or founding network member submitting a Challenge proposal for a new project
- ☐ I was awarded a Challenge grant in 2019 or 2020 and am submitting a proposal to continue/expand my 2019 or 2020 project. [“project expansion”]

Please check the box that most closely matches the issue area(s) the proposal you are submitting seeks to address:*

Please check up to four boxes

- ☐ Access, digital divide, and digital literacy
- ☐ Civic technology
- ☐ Community technology
- ☐ Crisis and disaster response
- ☐ Data and algorithms
- ☐ Design (accessible, inclusive, participatory)
- ☐ Digital privacy and security
- ☐ Diversity, inclusion, and equity
- ☐ Government technology
- ☐ Information and communications technologies for development (ICT4D)

- ☐ Media and journalism
- ☐ Movement, organizing, and activist technology
- ☐ Nonprofit technology
- ☐ Open data and transparency
- ☐ Open source and creative commons
- ☐ Policy (internet freedom, net neutrality, and more)
- ☐ Political technology
- ☐ Public science
- ☐ Technology cooperatives
- ☐ Other: _____

Proposals with a Significant Research or Data Component

The Challenge Fund recognizes that proposals for projects with significant research components and/or projects that will involve the collection and interpretation of data may require additional expert review. Therefore, if your proposed project falls under either or both of the following categories, please answer the additional set of questions as indicated. **Note that these types of projects will not receive special or additional consideration and will not be prioritized above other applications.**

Please check all that apply or leave blank

- ☐ My proposed project involves the collection/interpretation of data
- ☐ My proposed project involves a significant research component

B. APPLICANT INFORMATION

Proposal Title:*

Proposal Priority Area:*

Principal Investigator:*

Principal Investigator Phone Number:

Principal Investigator E-Mail Address:*

Affiliated Institution:*

Institutional Signatory Name:

Institutional Signatory E-mail Address:

Institution's Grants Office/Sponsored Research Office Contact and E-mail:

Collaborators:

Collaborator Institutions:

C. PROJECT INFORMATION

Elevator Pitch (300-character limit with spaces): Describe your project in a sentence:*

Project Plan (3,000-character limit with spaces): Describe your proposed project, including:*

(1) Objectives

(2) Method and process to meet those objectives

Project Expansion only—additional questions:

What has your project accomplished to date, and what do you anticipate accomplishing in the remainder of the year?

To the extent that you can respond at this juncture: How do you intend to build on your accomplishments to date and learn from missed opportunities in a potential second or third year?

(3) Timeline

(4) How you would spend the award amount (this should be an abbreviated version of the budget narrative that you will include in tab 3 of the Project Budget found in section D 'UPLOADS')

(5) Deliverables you would produce during the project, or other measurable outcomes

Impact (1,800-character limit with spaces):*

Please upload a theory of change following the attached PIT-UN Challenge template (found in the "Application Details" section). You will upload this document in section D, "Uploads".

Please provide an answer for all of the following questions:

Are other individuals or institutions working on similar concepts?

How will the project advance the field of Public Interest Technology and the goals described in the challenge announcement?

What is your plan for evaluating the project's success?

Network Impact (1,800-character limit with spaces):

Project Expansion only—additional questions:

How will this project benefit the PIT University Network?

Can your project be scaled to other schools and, if so, what steps would you take to help that scaling?

How will your project create shared resources or otherwise strengthen the community of educational institutions committed to Public Interest Technology?

Institutional Support (3,000-character limit with spaces):*

Please provide an answer for all of the following questions:

Why are you and your institution well positioned to undertake this project?

What experience or prior work among project team members demonstrates deep knowledge of the field of Public Interest Technology and/or other fields relevant for your proposed project?

For proposals requesting up to \$90,000 only: How has your university or institution demonstrated buy-in for your project that will help sustain the project's impact?

For proposals requesting between \$91,000 to \$180,000 only: What specific commitments from your university do you have to support your project and sustain its impact?

For project expansions only: How, if at all, will the project complement your project team's institutional plan(s) to advance Public Interest Technology within academia?

Equity, Diversity, Inclusion (3,000-character limit with spaces):

*Please answer the following questions to the fullest extent you are able**

What are the major barriers to equity and access related to Public Interest Technology, as your institution and project team understands them?

In what ways will your project's objectives and method address a subset of those problems?

What record do you have of serving ethnically, racially, socioeconomically diverse and underrepresented populations? If not yet in place, describe how you would use this funding to engage, serve, and collaborate with those populations in ways that are informed by best practices.

Please upload demographic information about your project following the attached PIT-UN Challenge template (found in the “Application Details” section). You will upload this document in section D, “Uploads”. Please note that providing this information is optional and designed to help PIT-UN measure and strengthen its impacts on equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Partnership (3,000-character limit with spaces):

List the partners, if any, that you have formally engaged or plan to formally engage to undertake this project? See “Evaluation Criteria” for a list of partnerships that the Challenge is looking for. **Note that you will need to upload letters of commitment from all named partners with this application.**

For each partnership, describe how you have cultivated a meaningful and equitable relationship with the partner entity. See “Evaluation Criteria” for guidance on meaningful and equitable partnerships. If this project includes a partnership with one or more additional universities, please describe how the partnership will operate, including division of work, role of Principal Investigators, and allocation of funds.

Proposals with a Significant Research or Data Component (3,000-character limit with spaces OR a three-page uploaded PDF)

[Applicants that checked the first and/or second boxes under section “A,” **Proposals with a Significant Research or Data Component**, will be asked to fill in the following additional questions.]

Please answer as many of the following questions as apply to your proposed project.

As an alternative to responding to the individual questions in this section, you may create a PDF document of up to three pages in length that responds to these questions and that includes any relevant visuals, diagrams, figures, graphics, etc. You will upload this document in section D, “Uploads”.

What is the underlying hypothesis driving your proposed project? What theoretical approaches will you draw from or apply in order to test your hypothesis?

What is the current state of research in the field of your proposed project, and how will your proposed project yield something unique and/or additive?

Why and how is your project team positioned to pursue this project to yield meaningful and impactful results?

What is your overall research plan, including major milestones or goals, implementation details, and potential risks and mitigation strategies?

In order to implement your proposed project, will you be collecting original data, drawing on existing data, or both? What informs your approach to the collection and use of data? If drawing on existing data, please specify your anticipated sources.

What are your plans to disseminate your research findings and how will you ensure that they are made accessible and enable the advancement of the field?

Relevant Work: Please include a link to any previous relevant work (e.g., previous publications, evidence of partnerships) and an accompanying brief description of what is included in the link.

D. UPLOADS

Please upload due diligence documents and any relevant work, if applicable.

- 1. Proof of legal status/IRS Letter of Determination:***
- 2. Project budget:*** Please upload a budget following the attached New Venture Fund template (found in the “Application Details” section) and include any funds that you intend to contribute from your institution or other sources.
- 3. Most recent audited financials:*** Please upload audited financials for 2019 or 2020. If no audited financials are available for those years, please upload an explanation why.
- 4. Institution 990:***
- 5. List of board of directors or board of trustees:***
- 6. List of main staff for the project:***
- 7. Will your work include interacting or communicating with minors?**

☐ Yes

☐ No

Please upload the “NVF Child Safeguarding Policy Information Sheet” if your work will include interacting or communicating with minors (individuals under the age of 18).

- 8. Theory of change:** Please upload a theory of change following the attached template (found in the “Application Details” section).*
- 9. Demographic data:** Please upload demographic information following the attached template (found in the “Application Details” section).

10. Relevant work: Please upload any documents that support the content of your application. Any work uploaded must be explicitly identified and described in the answers to your application questions. Uploads might include strategic plans, departmental plans and budgets, etc.

For proposals with a significant research or data component: If you choose, you may upload a document, up to three pages in length, that includes responses to supplemental questions and any relevant visuals, diagrams, figures, graphs, etc.

The combined total pages for *all* uploaded relevant work documents should be 10 pages or less.

E. Challenge Timeline (Dates subject to change)

April 15, 2021	Public announcement of the Challenge
July 15, 2021	Applications due
Week of October 11, 2021	NVF notifies grant recipients of their upcoming award
January 1, 2022	Grant period starts

F. Distribution of Funds and Reporting Requirements

Grant funds must be spent within 12 months of receipt of funds, with the possibility to extend for a further year with permission of the New Venture Fund. Grant recipients will be required to submit a final report describing their project. Recipients will work with New America and the New Venture Fund throughout the award period to evaluate their projects and present their work.