

VOICE PROJECT REPORT

“CivHacks” by Mansi Seth

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I. MISSION

In the current state of our world, there has never been more of a need to create interdisciplinary communities to build tools for important social change. Despite the value of STEM in civic engagement, there has always been a large disconnect between the two disciplines. That is why our focus was on creating a space to help bridge the gap between STEM and civic engagement by challenging participants to address major issues within the realm of civic engagement using tech.

We prided ourselves in helping both beginners and experienced hackers explore technology and develop their skills—with a conscience. Because of this, all kinds of hacks were allowed (software, hardware, data-driven). If a team just had an idea, design, or prototype, their project was still considered.

II. BACKGROUND

CivHacks was a virtual hackathon hosted by the Associated Students of the University of California (ASUC), the officially recognized student association at the University of California, Berkeley taking place on the weekend of November 13-14, 2021. In the span of 48 hours, participants had the opportunity to create new applications, websites, or software projects. With a focus on providing a welcoming, engaging and creative environment to support social good in tech culture, students formed teams to help tackle issues affecting civics. Participants worked from 12 pm on Saturday to 4 pm on Sunday to create projects based on a prompt to create a product that would make civic engagement more accessible to the general population.

Tracks

Beginner — We believe that anyone has the potential to innovate. This track was created to prompt beginner hackers to use their unlimited passions and ideas to hop in the realm of tech innovation. Participants were assigned a mentor who had experience in hackathons to help guide them through this process. Mentors also got a chance to participate with their group to win the top prizes, as well as be gifted a \$20 gift card for their help.

Regular Civics — This past year has had multiple low points, affecting our beliefs in our system of government, politics, and agencies, but it is one that requires us to have a lot

of reflection and work towards social change. This track prompted hackers to create solutions to benefit our community on a local, state, or federal level through the following guiding questions:

How might we...

- Motivate Millennials and Gen Z to advocate and participate in civic engagement?
- Improve the online voting process and simplify registration?
- Increase efficiency in public services?

Prizes

First Place Beginner and Regular Hack:

- \$400 per winning team towards gift cards of your choice
- \$100 per winning team to charity/research institution of your choice
- One year of Wolfram|One Personal Edition
- One-year subscription to Wolfram|Alpha Pro
- Special opportunity to present to California State Controller Betty Yee

Second Place Beginner and Regular Hack:

- \$300 for the winning team towards gift cards of your choice
- \$100 to charity/research institution of your choice
- One year of Wolfram|One Personal Edition
- One-year subscription to Wolfram|Alpha Pro
- Special opportunity to present to California State Controller Betty Yee

Volunteers and Sponsors

Organizations:

- ASUC Vote Coalition — <https://asuc.org/vote/>
- Earth Hacks — <https://earthhacks.io>
- WebDev at Berkeley — <https://webatberkeley.org/>
- Digital Privacy Decal — <https://privacy-decal.com/>
- Computer Science Undergraduate Association — <https://www.csua.berkeley.edu/>

Sponsors:

- WolframAlpha — <https://www.wolframalpha.com/>

Judges:

- Charron Andrus, MA — Associate CISO, UC Berkeley
- Scott Seaborn, MA — Campus Privacy Officer, UC Berkeley
- Sheila Baxter Lamb, MPH — Chief of Staff, Kaiser Permanente Digital
- Bhargav Sathish — Co-Founder, Earth Hacks
- Betty Yee — California State Controller

III. OUTCOMES

Over 50 signups, 33 participants connected through their Discord channel, and nine projects submitted; beginners and experienced hackers alike had the opportunity to explore technology and develop their skills as they built solutions organized around societal issues.

All submitted projects can be viewed here: <https://civhacks-fall21.devpost.com/project-gallery>.

The winning project for the beginner track was “Volunteams,” which was created by Berkeley sophomores Saikrishna Achalla and Sushant Vema. Volunteams is a platform to incentive more volunteering among people of all age groups, by creating partnerships between younger and older volunteers (<https://devpost.com/software/volunteams>). The winning project for the regular track was “Warden,” which was created by Berkeley freshmen Adithya Tummala, Austin Ardisaputra, and Bradley Tian. Warden aims to enhance the current emergency notification system by compiling a record of past criminal activities and generating various visualizations of crime rate data (<https://devpost.com/software/warden-nevh5p>).