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TECH HUB



smart municipality hackathon

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Empire Partner Foundation Tech Hub's second hackathon showcases local problem-solving capabilities.

Johannesburg, 14th December 2020. Following on from our first successful hackathon in November, Empire Partner Foundation's (EPF) Tech Hub closed out the year with a successful second digital hackathon focused primarily on solving complex challenges that municipalities face today.

This Digital Gauteng City Region hackathon took place over the 12th and 13th December 2020 in Illovo, Johannesburg. Municipalities today face a plethora of challenges in being able to effectively provide services to their residents while also increasing their own level of efficiencies. This hackathon provided the developers with a number of problem statements allowing participants free reign to innovatively solve these complex challenges.



The Digital GCR is a platform that brings together existing and new information, opportunities and useful resources via an e-platform for the public good, including current planning challenges and poor service delivery. The platform provides a digital ecosystem where innovators can deeply understand challenges in real-time in order to develop comprehensive, tech-focused solutions.

The focus on local government solutions has been emphasized following an enthusiastic pledge of support by the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) towards the Digital GCR platform. In his keynote speech at our first hackathon, Xolile George, Chief Executive Officer of SALGA, left the developers inspired after reiterating the impact that technology can have in improving local government planning and service delivery.

The diverse panel of guest speakers for the second hackathon included Yershen Pillay, CEO of the Chemical Industries Education & Training Authority

who touched on how technology has advanced and can have a widespread impact in a much shorter timeframe. Reshaad Sha, founder of BriteGaze also shared some words of guidance and encouragement to the participants. Hymie Marnewick, Managing Director of XLink, shared his industry insights with the developers with the final keynote presented by the hackathon head judges, Lavina Ramkisoan and Tahir Sema, one of Mail & Guardians Top 200 Young and Inspirational South Africans.

“We thought about how we can use this recent hackathon as a springboard for innovative digital solutions that will have a real impact on local government. We explored how we can use tech to improve the communication between municipalities and residents to ensure that residents participate in the development of their own municipalities and that municipalities provide a standardised level of service to residents across the country,” says Akivan Kemraj, CEO of the EPF Tech Hub.





An additional dimension that was added in this hackathon was the consideration of both the available data and new data that can be collected and utilized in developing solutions for municipalities. Our key sponsor for this event was BriteGaze, a new entrant in the enabling technologies environment with a focus on leveraging data to build out Artificial Intelligence infused solutions. BriteGaze has also recently launched an AI fund that will assist businesses working in the AI space to accelerate their growth path to solve challenges that we face on the African continent.

The developer team that came up with the most innovative solution consisted of Sanele Langa, Remonn van Niekerk and Thulani Langa who worked together to build a fully functioning platform that integrated USSD technology for residents to communicate with their municipalities. They took home the grand prize of R10,000 in cash along with a masterclass on business model innovation that will inject some critical thinking and associated consideration for the monetisation of any technology solution. The remaining four teams split the difference of the R24,000 cash prize and nobody left the hackathon empty handed.

“We recognize the importance of creating opportunity and incorporating trends shaping the future and we want to empower the young developers of today to become leaders for South Africa and the African continent,” says Akivan.

At the prize-giving ceremony, the EPF Tech Hub announced that a lucky recipient will receive a software development bursary for the 2021 academic year, sponsored by XLink. The bursary winner will be announced on 22 December 2020. Applications for the bursary are open on the EPF Tech Hub website: www.EmpirePartnerFoundation.org.



The EPF Tech Hub has committed to further collaboration with the developer community as they continue to build the Digital GCR platform. They have made an open invitation for new developers to join the community, aiming to have a minimum of 100 developers in the community by the end of 2021.

“The challenges that we experience in our everyday lives present key opportunities for the tech-community to come together, apply their skills and develop innovative solutions to create a world-class country. The EPF Tech Hub will give this community a voice and a platform to showcase their solutions to the world” says Akivan.

The event was a resounding success and the Empire Partner Foundation Tech Hub would like to thank everyone who made the time and effort to attend the Hackathon.



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